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WORKING PAPER - SIAP

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**Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific****Workshop 'Forging Partnerships in Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific'
25 and 26 November 2002, Bangkok, Thailand****HAMMERING THE CONTOURS****SIAP's Viewpoints on (the Urgency of) Partnerships in Statistical Training****1. Introduction**

The intention of this paper is to initialize and inspire the discussions in the workshop 'Forging Partnerships in Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific'. The paper starts with a background on the United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) and continues with the results of two studies in the region, the first one on statistical training needs and statistical training institutes (1999) and the second on e-learning (2002), complemented with some recent findings of the Institute with regard to an inventory on the demand for country courses. The urgency of tying up the relations between organizations involved in statistical training forms the final part of this paper. A short overview of recent collaboration initiatives of SIAP is followed by some suggestions concerning emerging areas for partnerships.

2. United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP)¹

The mission of the United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) is:

'To strengthen the capability of national statistical systems in the region and to enhance statistical training capabilities and related activities at the country level through practically oriented training of official statisticians in order to produce timely and high-quality statistics that can be utilized for economic and social development planning'.

SIAP is an institute which trains officers of national statistical organizations (NSOs) in the member countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on the concepts, methods, and practices in the production and dissemination of official statistics.

The Institute organizes courses conducted jointly with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) at the SIAP premises in Makuhari, Chiba and which are classified under the Tokyo Metropolitan Area (TMA) based programme. Yearly repeating curricula in this series are: (a) 'Modules on core official statistics', with a duration of 6 months; and (b) three 2-month courses, namely 'Applications of Information and Communications Technology for Statistical Processes', 'Interpretation and Analysis of Official Statistics' and the country-focused special course for officials from a specific country (e.g. Cambodia) or group of countries from a specific ESCAP sub-region (e.g. Central Asian republics).

Furthermore SIAP is in its second year of granting research fellowships in which participants are offered resources to complete a 2-month research project in Makuhari relating to statistics collected by their NSOs under the guidance of a faculty member of the Institute.

The next category falls under the framework of the Outreach programme and consists of the Regional and Country courses. The length of Regional courses varies from 1 to 4 weeks and the participants come from member countries within a specific sub-region of ESCAP. Examples in this program are: regular courses on 'Sampling surveys' and specialized trainings like 'Disability

¹ More details on SIAP may be found in the annex 1: 'SIAP Information Brochure 2002'.

statistics' and 'Data management and statistical dissemination'. The Country courses are organized in cooperation with national organizations. The attendance is restricted to own nationals. In general these are short courses on selected topics as for instance 'Poverty indicators', 'Human Development Reports' and 'Forecasting of agricultural production'.

In principle, all courses and fellowships are free for the participants. In the case of attendance of a course in another than the home country, reimbursement is made of additional costs in travel and daily subsistence (and/or accommodation). These attractive financial participation conditions are enabled due to the generous provision of facilities and financial contributions by the Japanese government and, on a more modest, but still substantial scale, other national governments and international organizations like United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Bank.

SIAP has a small staff with a director, deputy director cum lecturer, 5 statisticians/lecturers, 1 training assistant and a supporting staff of 3. In addition to this UN staff, a special unit of 12 staff members, assigned by the Japanese Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications (MPHPT), provides organizational and administrative support. For the conduct of its courses SIAP also employs the services of external lecturers to augment faculty capability.

The Institute is housed in a modern building in the new town of Makuhari, Chiba, which is located in the outskirts of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area. SIAP courses are held in 4 lecture rooms and one computer room. The computer room is equipped with a network of the latest model workstations, which are all connected to the central Internet and email-server. The software packages installed on the computers are recent versions of applications that are commonly used in the environment of the NSOs (MS Office, SAS, SPSS etc.). The Institute has at its disposal a library of statistical materials and also offers the staff and participants access to the library of the Institute for Developing Economies (IDE) with which SIAP shares the office building complex.

Participation in courses, and especially for the TMA-based programs, is mostly based on a selection from candidates nominated by the individual countries. In several cases concessions have to be made with regard to the prerequisites, because of a lack of sufficiently qualified nominees from certain countries. Consequently, participant groups are sometimes relatively heterogeneous in educational level and work experience. However the cultural and ethnic diversity of the participant mix adds to the rich opportunities for the training environment to promote learning.

3. Findings of SIAP with regard to statistical training needs and training institutes.

3.1. Survey on 'Statistical training needs and training institutes in the ESCAP-region' (1999)²

SIAP organized in May 1999 a survey with two objectives in view: (a) to arrive at an inventory of the training needs in the ESCAP region with regard to the statistical subject-areas falling under the competence of the Institute, and (b) to gather information on the existing statistical training programmes undertaken by national bodies. The survey-questionnaire was sent by mail and fax to the heads of the national statistical organizations (NSOs) in the region. From the 53 forms which were sent out, 45 responses were received, although it was observed that the majority of non responding countries were located in the Oceania sub-region.

The following general conclusions could be drawn with respect to the training needs in 1999:

- (a) The need for statistical education in the ESCAP region was very high. The number of potential participants totaled up to more than 5,000 and 26 course subjects had the interest of more than 50% of the respondents. The 23

² The two final reports as submitted to the Governing Board are added to this paper as respectively annex 2 and annex 3.

remaining course subjects in the list counted at least 3 interested countries each.

- (b) In general, a shift from general courses to specialized training courses in emerging fields was requested to be applied in SIAP's course programmes.
- (c) As far as the course topics are concerned the survey showed under the subject-matter headings of 'social statistics' and 'economic statistics' a broad spread in the sub-regions East & South-East Asia and South-Central & Western Asia. Oceania requested special emphasis on 'price statistics' and 'external trade statistics' as elements of 'economic statistics'.
- (d) The course topics with the highest indicated training needs were (in a-select order): 'national accounts', 'analysis and interpretation' and '(electronic) data processing'. The trend seemed to be that the 'horizontal' (process-related) areas were getting as much importance as the subject-matter areas.

Information was also collected on national training organizations and the preparedness of the country organizations to collaborate with SIAP in the organization and conduct of training. Some of the reported conclusions were³:

- (a) a large majority of countries was prepared to collaborate with SIAP in organizing either country-focused or regional courses or both kinds of courses;
- (b) most of the responding countries, however, indicated interests in only some single subject-areas; countries responding positively for collaboration in country-focused courses in more than 10 subject-areas were Philippines, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Papua New Guinea;
- (c) four countries, namely Australia, Philippines, Turkey and Uzbekistan, responded positively on collaboration with SIAP in organizing regional courses in more than 10 subject areas;
- (d) the 'offer-side' of in-house courses for external participants was limited, especially since most in-house courses are conducted in the national language. Yet, there were several interesting openings offered for external participation in Australia, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Philippines, Russian Federation and Turkey.

3.2. Survey on 'E-learning for Statistical training in the ESCAP-region' (2002)⁴

SIAP submitted in 2002 a proposal to its Governing Board concerning E-learning, which was to be pursued through a Virtual Statistical Training Access (ViSTA) facility involving the participation of four groups: the contents provider, the supervising trainers, the course administrators, and the technicians responsible for the infrastructure. SIAP would have been responsible for the first three groups, with possible assistance from the NSOs or key training-centres in the country or the region. The infrastructure support was to be outsourced, and possibly the provision of the contents in e-learning format. Under the active (structured) mode, class discussions and interaction were to be optimized in the country/regional learning centers which will be virtual (through the Internet) SIAP facilities.

The Governing Board, however, advised SIAP to move slowly and cautiously on this modality, to review developments in similar fields elsewhere, and to initially develop materials for CD-ROM. Meanwhile SIAP conducted in 2002 a mail survey directed to the fifty-one heads of NSOs in the ESCAP region to gather inputs to be considered for its future e-learning strategy. The following are some of the findings from the 30 responses received:

- (a) twenty-two of thirty responding countries agreed that e-learning is a good

³ Japan was not included in the overview, since it has an evident special and utmost important position in statistical training of developing countries in so far as the organization of SIAP courses is concerned

⁴ The summarizing report is given in annex 4.

initiative for SIAP to follow through while seven countries indicated to be waiting for results of small-scale projects and/or feasibility studies..

- (b) about ninety percent (26/30) advised that SIAP proceed with small-scale projects and six countries suggested a companion feasibility study.
- (c) subject matter priorities varied from poverty indicators to business registers to dissemination standards to website design to time-use statistics and the differences in priorities did not appear to be significant.
- (d) Internet access for participating in the e-learning courses via the World Wide Web is available today in at least half (15/30) of the responding countries.
- (e) participation in e-learning courses with CD-ROM as medium is additionally at least possible in 9 countries without Internet access for participants.
- (f) seventy percent (21/28) is prepared to partner with SIAP in the future development, design and conduct of the e-learning courses.

3.3. Inventory of requests for country courses (2001/2002)⁵

In November 2001 SIAP wrote the member countries for suggestions on country courses which they might wish to jointly organize for the next 3 academic years, up till 2004. Under this collaborative arrangement, SIAP will be responsible for drawing up the syllabus, providing the resource persons, and preparing the training materials. The host government is expected to absorb the expenses related to the organization of arrangements for the course, including costs of providing the lecture venue and facilities (projector, white board, etc.), reproduction of training materials, and costs relating to the participants.

Fifteen countries responded with proposals for thirty-four country courses, complete with dates, venue, subject-matter coverage, and number and level of participants. The Philippines submitted 10 proposed courses.

Two countries informed their desire to have training courses through the ESCAP Statistics Division: Fiji and Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea. Three countries expressed their needs in the 7th session of the Governing Board: India, Mongolia and Singapore.

All in all, twenty countries have filed requests for thirty-nine country courses for the next three (academic) years.

3.4. Some conclusions

It is evident that there exists a huge need and demand for training in official statistics in the ESCAP region. The difficulty, however, is that the needs of the individual countries diversify widely. Many countries are still facing problems in setting up their basic statistical collection, processing and dissemination systems. Others, and especially those with more advanced statistical systems, are looking for new expertise in advanced statistical methodologies and in the implementation of the latest computer technologies. The prioritization in the offering of training programmes is very complex, since both extremes in the demand side ought to be satisfied. Only focusing on the basics would inevitably evoke arrears with regard to necessary future modernization that will be hard to make up in a next phase, while solely addressing new technologies and methodologies would hinder the urgently needed improvement of less advanced statistical systems.

Fortunately, the supply-side of statistical training courses and workshops is also quite substantive. Many international organizations, like World Bank, ILO, UNSD and TES-Institute, organize courses or offer support or assistance for training of national statisticians in the region. National statistical organizations of developed countries (Australia, Japan, Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, United States, Canada etc) provide also on a regular base capacity building

⁵ The final list is given in annex 5.

support. And finally, national training organizations are increasingly engaged in the training of the local statisticians as well as, at least to a certain extent, nationals from neighboring countries.

In general there exists relatively little cooperation and synchronization between the various region wide statistical training systems and programs. The prioritization of activities is mostly not coordinated and the outcomes do not always reflect the national and international priorities in statistical programs and the individual needs of the countries. Sometimes initiatives are partly overlapping each other and conflicting viewpoints are presented concerning solutions for methodological and technological statistical problems. In many cases one might see a clear multiplication of efforts for exactly the same output, like for instance the development of training materials. The necessary after-course-follow-up is in many cases missing.

In conclusion SIAP would like to suggest that the efficiency and effectiveness of the combined training efforts could substantially be improved by better coordination and extended collaboration in enduring partnerships between all organizations involved in statistical training in the region. This Bangkok workshop may hopefully contribute to the initialization and extension of the international collaboration.

4. Recent SIAP partnership initiatives

4.1. Distance Education

There have been initial, and favourable, talks on arranging possible partnerships with TES (Training for European Statisticians) Institute and CESD (Centre for European Statistical Development) Communautaire for availing of the VL-C@TS Project, including the nature of the courses, manner of delivery of courses, and/or its technical infrastructure. The compilation of a pilot training CD-ROM on international trade statistics is under consideration.

4.2. Preparation of Training Tools

Participants have requested for more participative training techniques, like practical exercises and group discussions. Therefore, SIAP looks forward to developing and/or using course materials that would increase involvement of participants. It intends to work with the Australian Bureau of Statistics in preparing case studies in statistics, such as Design of Household Budget Surveys, which would be used as training tools to clarify concepts, introduce methods, and discuss decision-making situations concerning statistical activities carried out by an NSO. SIAP has also expressed the desire to exchange similar expertise and materials with the TES Institute, CESD Communautaire and EUROSTAT. Talks are proceeding with the World Bank Institute to explore the adoption of the training design and materials developed and used under its Poverty Analysis Initiative in the component of poverty statistics in SIAP training courses.

SIAP took the initiative to build an electronic archive of materials used at the various training courses for easy re-use and reference for own staff and for trainees and interested outsiders. Training materials used in the outreach training programmes will also be included in this collection. These would constitute the base materials to be converted electronically for the distance education programme. The archive could also be used for benchmarking of the curriculum and training materials.

4.3. Programme for Building Statistical Training Capability in LDCs

Seven countries classified by ESCAP as 'least developed countries' have agreed to participate in the 3-Year Programme for Building Statistical Training Capability in National Statistical Offices of ESCAP Least Developed Countries Through SIAP Courses and Related Activities. Participating NSOs have been asked:

1. to identify their priorities wherein SIAP can assist to build through training singly or jointly with other interested partner institutions;

2. to name proposed candidates to the TMA-based courses over the next three years or invitations; and
3. to indicate activities which will complement the participation in TMA-based courses through the Outreach Programme.

SIAP is committed to assign highest priority for selection of nominees and will provide selected participants with additional guidance, materials, and exposure to the priority subject matter chosen by the NSO. In return, the participating NSO should be obliged to assign the staff member upon return from training to the position where he can apply to the fullest what was learned. The NSO also has to ensure that the staff member is able to conduct training in his/her office which will re-echo the course content. The number of staff members trained as a result of this arrangement should be reported within 6 months after the return of the participant.

SIAP will support the technical requirements for re-echo training: lecture materials, hand-outs to participants, and access to SIAP e-learning modules (upon availability). Token financial assistance may be extended whenever possible to support the reproduction of these materials. SIAP may accredit and utilize this pool of SIAP graduates as resource persons for jointly conducted country training activities.

4.4. Requests for Country Courses

As mentioned in Paragraph 3.3., SIAP corresponded with the NSOs to solicit information on their requests for country courses for 2002 up to 2004. To establish priorities in selection of country courses, SIAP ranked the 20 countries according to (1) extent of counterpart support to SIAP, (2) date of submission of proposal, and (3) number of SIAP course/s held in the country in the past 3 years. In this prioritization scheme, higher rank is given to countries with greater counterpart support, earlier date of submission and less number of SIAP courses held in the country. Annex 5 presents the resulting rankings of the countries with information on area of training, topics to be covered and proposed dates of training.

4.5. Research based Training Programme

The Research-based Training Programme (RbTP) was launched as a Tokyo Metropolitan Area (TMA) based programme in April 2001. The programme provides an additional training modality for middle and senior government statisticians with the objective of raising their capability in undertaking independent research in official statistics and preparing quality statistical reports.

Each fellow accepted into the RbTP is expected to carry out the research activities specified in the research proposal that was the basis for his/her acceptance. At the end of the period of fellowship, the trainee is expected to have completed a research paper under the guidance of a faculty supervisor. As part of the research process, the trainee presents the results of his/her research in a seminar organized for that purpose at the SIAP.

The research papers produced under the programme are to be made available as training resources for the training programmes of SIAP. For this purpose, the research paper is subjected to a review by a referee who is a recognized authority in the subject of research. This review process and the written comments of the referees will also be made available as training resources, in printed or electronic (CD-ROM) format.

Given the experience of the first year of implementation, SIAP proposed a reformat of the programme to its Governing Board. The latter advised favorably on SIAP's proposals. The programme will now migrate from a TMA-based course with individually supervised participants to a sub-regional group training under the Outreach Programme. The emphasis will no longer be the full completion of a research project, but the training in research methodology resulting in an adequately sustained research proposal for each individual participant. The duration will be changed from 8 weeks to 6 weeks. This new sub-regional training format would enable the training of an additional 5 to 8 more trainees per year for the same cost as for the training of 5 fellows in Makuhari, Japan. An additional advantage is, that the geographical

distribution of fellowships could be improved considerably under this format.

SIAP is looking for partnerships with training institutions having the staff and facilities to accommodate and to supervise jointly with SIAP staff this type of training programs.

5. SIAP suggestions concerning partnership initiatives

5.1. Set-up of an organizational framework for cooperation in statistical training

In order to arrive at continued coordination of statistical training efforts and to expandable and lasting partnerships, it would be recommended to set up an organizational framework for this cooperation. Options may vary from just a periodic yearly meeting (as this Bangkok workshop) to a more substantial institutionalization in the form of an international program or working party. The workshop participants are encouraged to express their viewpoints and preferences with this regard.

5.2. Practicalities around the exchange of programmes and training materials.

As stated earlier we might substantially improve the efficiency of the organization and preparation of training courses if we could use the inputs of comparable programmes. The stock of 'deliverable' material has to be compiled and maintained and good arrangements on the practicalities are required. Examples of elements to be organized are: the conditions for provision (preferably standardized?), the publication of available material (via website?), the quality assessment of material etc.

5.3. E-learning initiatives

As requested by many countries, SIAP wishes to start with pilot projects in E-learning while using internet and CD-Rom as media. The Institute prefers to develop these programs in close collaboration with other organizations. The web-based system as exploited by the TES-Institute (VI-C@ts) could most probably provide the necessary technical architecture for internet-learning. The Institute would appreciate to be informed on the viewpoints of the workshop participants on priorities and practical arrangements. For the preparation of material and the organization of learner support (the latter preferably a combination of central and local elements) partnerships are sought.

5.4. Assistance to national programmes

Some national statistical organizations in the region are momentarily planning the set up (for instance Malaysia and India) or the re-organization (Viet Nam) of their national statistical training organization. Many other countries are completely lacking own training organizations and do even not deliver systematic training programmes for their staff. The support of these countries by organizations already having substantial experience and expertise in the organization and conduct of statistical training should, in the opinion of SIAP, get high priority. It would substantially facilitate the further spread of statistical knowledge and skills in the region by the national multiplication of training activities of other organizations.

5.5. Bi-lateral arrangements between institutions

The workshop meeting provides a good occasion for setting up bi-lateral (or multi-lateral) arrangements between the participating institutions. An example is the request of SIAP for partnerships in the Research based Training Programme (see paragraph 4.5). Obviously the floor will be open for all comparable ad-hoc requests of the other organizations and the participants are encouraged to freely discuss this type of arrangements.