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**PAPER - SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY**

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# **SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY**



## **Statistics Programme**

### **Strategic Plan 2003–2005**

**Background document submitted to Workshop on “Forging  
Partnerships in Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific”  
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## ACRONYMS

DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (United Nations)
NSO	National Statistics Office
NSS	National statistical system
PICTs	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
PRISM	Pacific Regional Information System
RMHS	Regional Meeting of Heads of Statistics (triennial)
SIAP	Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (United Nations)
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community

## 1 Introduction to the Statistics Programme and its Strategic Plan

The Statistics Programme of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) is part of the Social Resources Division. It shares a similar goal to the Demography/Population Programme and collaborates with other SPC programmes in areas of mutual interest. The section shares the mission of the Social Resources Division: *“to maximise the development potential of Pacific Island people in health, culture and information and enhance the empowerment of women and young people”*.

The section comprises of the Statistician, Assistant Statistician, Statistical Training Specialist, Statistical Research Officer and Programme Assistant. It is anticipated that two additional positions - Internet Programmer/Developer and Database Manager, each of 12 month terms - will be established as part of the PRISM project (DFID) during the period July 2002-April 2004 (DFID). The Statistician manages the Programme and reports directly to the Head of the Social Resources Division, who is SPC's Deputy Director-General in Noumea.

The section aims to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems (NSSs) to provide the region's policy-makers and analysts with a wide range of key indicators to support their work. In particular, it aims to anticipate emerging regional needs for information and to help NSSs produce outputs that satisfy those needs. By ensuring that statistical outputs are relevant and of good quality, the Programme is serving a vital role in supporting regional decision-making about the lives and futures of Pacific people.

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to provide a clear strategic direction to guide the Programme over the three years from 2003 to 2005. It serves as a guide for the Programme's work planning, management, monitoring, evaluation and reporting over the next three years. It provides a useful medium for communicating information about identified gaps and related issues to major stakeholders, and is an information and communication tool for stakeholders and the general public.

This Strategic Plan identifies the long-term goal for the Programme, along with component objectives and outputs (results) that it will be accountable for achieving. It includes appropriate performance indicators to enable both management and external stakeholders to objectively verify progress towards the outputs and objectives. The summary activities needed to ensure the delivery of the agreed outputs are also documented. A key element of the Strategic Plan is its inbuilt flexibility, which will allow the Programme to adjust its priorities and activities according to emerging or changing needs of Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs). This is achieved through the section being able to adjust its responses and approach based on the results of the annual Training Needs and Consultancy questionnaires and at the triennial meeting in 2003 (RMHS13), while retaining the Plan's overall integrity.

## 2 Pacific Context and Challenges

Sound decision-making relies heavily on the range and quality of economic and social information available, generally in the form of official statistics. Without good quality statistics, economic, social, environmental and cultural policies cannot be researched and formulated effectively, nor can the impact of policy decisions be measured. Major users of official statistics include government line ministries, non-governmental organisations, international organisations, educational institutions, commercial enterprises and individuals. But a number of PICTs either do not yet have a set of core statistics available on a regular basis, or have statistics that lack consistency and quality that fail to meet international statistical standards. Additionally, many statistics that are produced do not necessarily reflect the operational and policy priorities of the country. As an indication of the level of awareness of this issue,

the Forum Economic Ministers Meetings, the main means of economic policy dialogue among Forum members, have recognised that “better information” is a major priority for the region and that there is a need for further technical assistance to meet international statistical standards.

The problem of inadequate information throughout the region is compounded by significant inefficiencies in the distribution of what information does exist, with many key users unaware of or unable to access potentially valuable indicators. This situation is reflected in the lack of a recognised standard source for national and regional statistics, particularly via the Internet. As a result, users are often unable to find key data or, alternatively, find a range of conflicting data for what appears to be the same indicator.

The Statistics Programme’s primary clients are the National Statistical Offices of SPC’s 22 Pacific Island member countries and territories, ranging from very small units with only 2 or 3 staff to large national systems with over 100 staff. However, the capacity of individual NSOs to meet national statistical needs varies significantly from country to country, and not necessarily in direct proportion to the size of the office. Some of the smaller offices are more responsive and often produce a higher quality and better range of statistical information than their counterparts in larger PICTs. Government commitment to NSOs (particularly as measured by budget allocations) varies significantly throughout the region, with a number of NSOs even in larger countries having very limited Internet and e-mail access, and many NSOs often lacking in basic physical resources.

The range of activities of NSOs can be broadly grouped as:

- economic statistics (e.g. national accounts, government finance statistics);
- mathematical statistics (e.g. sample survey design);
- social statistics (including demography); and, increasingly
- environmental and cultural statistics.

Many activities of NSOs cross over these categories (e.g. labour statistics have both social and economic implications), underlining the importance of a balanced and integrated approach to strengthening statistical capabilities. However, the very small size of some NSOs prevents them from developing the capacity or all of the skills needed to prepare a full range of statistical outputs. At the country level, NSOs have a traditionally high rate of staff turnover, which compounds the problem of sustainable capacity building.

The SPC Statistics Programme has been providing assistance to the region’s statistics offices for three decades, for much of that time in the form of broad statistical training, the intention being that skills would be employed and shared, thereby developing on the job skills and strengthening NSOs as well as individuals. But all too often NSOs were unable to benefit fully from that training: many of the more talented staff moved on to other agencies offering better conditions and challenges, while many other staff went back to doing the same work they were doing before the training. In 1997 there was a major change in the Programme’s potential to provide more effective assistance, with AusAID funding a new position of Statistical Training Specialist. This additional resource enabled the Programme to significantly improve the range and effectiveness of its training activities, in particular by developing a number of new and highly specialised training activities eg, computing applications and management training, both tailored for the specific needs of NSOs, and economic statistics.

In recognition that the provision of specialist training to smaller NSOs is often not justifiable, mainly because of the higher risk associated with the loss of key personnel, the Programme places considerable emphasis on the provision of capacity supplementation (technical assistance) to these member countries. In recent years the Programme members have had a very wide range of individual statistical expertise,

and this has enabled the Programme to provide a wider range of technical assistance than previously, including the key area of national accounts. This increased breadth of assistance has generated very positive feedback from member countries.

The Programme has also maintained a basic regional information service for many years, although resource constraints have meant that it has never developed to the point of resolving the problems mentioned above with disseminating data effectively throughout the region.

### **3 The SPC Response**

The Statistics Programme will respond to these challenges as follows:

- Develop new services and / or adapt existing ones as members' needs change, and help member NSOs to utilise emerging technologies and respond to changing priorities for statistical information. The Programme will put particular emphasis on satisfying requests by PICTs in response to the annual Training and Consultancy Needs questionnaires;
- Maximise long-term benefits of capacity building by targeting specialised training primarily at those member countries where sustainability of skills can reasonably be expected, with a corresponding emphasis on capacity supplementation in other countries;
- Maintain a wide range of statistical expertise within Programme staff members so as to be able to respond as fully as possible to the statistical needs of PICTs;
- Develop an Internet-based information system for the Pacific region, working with all NSSs in the region to provide a recognised and definitive source for official statistics for the Pacific region. (The Programme has obtained funding from DFID for such a project, which will be known as the *Pacific Regional Information System* (PRISM) and will run until April 2004);
- Maintain effective relationships with other SPC Programmes and regional and international organisations, providing appropriate advice and support for any projects in the region with a statistics component.

### **4 Priorities**

The Programme will focus its attention and activities over the three years covered by this Strategic Plan to:

- maintain a wide range of statistical and related skills within the Programme, and use those skills to provide statistical training and technical assistance tailored to the needs of the region;
- develop PRISM, leading to a world-class service for storing and disseminating key data for the Pacific region;
- organise and host the triennial RMHS13 and associated technical meeting in September 2003, and adapt Programme plans and activities to incorporate directions from those meetings;
- work closely with other SPC programmes and regional and international organisations to ensure the overall effectiveness of statistical activities in the region.

## 5 Mandate

SPC's mission is to develop the technical, professional, scientific, research, planning and management capability of Pacific Island people to enable them to make informed decisions about their future development.

SPC's governing bodies, the Conference of the Pacific Community and the Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA), provide the mandate for the programme and set its key directions. Heads of agency and other technical meetings play an important role in confirming these directions and identifying emerging problems

The Triennial Regional Meeting of Heads of Statistics (RMHS) provides medium-term guidance for the Programme. The 12<sup>th</sup> RMHS, held in 2000, strongly supported the Statistics Programme's recent work, including its high priority assigned to developing statistical training sections in response to emerging needs of National Statistics Offices (NSOs). The directives from RMHS are supplemented between triennial meetings by responses to the annual training needs questionnaire sent to each NSO.

As recent as July 2002, the FEMM formally acknowledged the assistance that the SPC was giving to PICTs in the area of statistics and recognised that additional technical assistance was required in order to meet international statistical standards.

## 6 Mission, Goal and Objectives

The section contributes towards the mission of the Social Resources Division, which is "*to maximise the development potential of Pacific Island people in health, culture and information and enhance the empowerment of women and young people*".

The goal of the Statistics Programme is:

*Improved availability and analysis of PICT socio-economic data.*

The Programme has identified three objectives for the three years covered by this Plan:

1. good quality socio-economic information for PICTs;
2. effective access to NSS outputs; and
3. international awareness and recognition of PICT statistical needs and priorities.



## 7 Outputs, Activities and Performance Indicators by Objective

### Objective 1: Good quality socio-economic information for PICTs

#### *Output 1.1: Improved statistical and related skills of NSS staff*

The Programme aims to strengthen the skills of NSS staff across all aspects of their work, from recognising the need to collect particular data, through designing and implementing projects, to data processing, editing and preparing reports. With stronger skills, NSSs can respond more effectively to key information needs, even where resources are limited.

To meet this output, the Programme will focus on the following **main activities**:

- provide a range of training programmes to equip NSOs with core and advanced skills that meet emerging or changing needs in PICTs;
- provide opportunities for advanced one-on-one skills transfer through attachments to the Statistics Programme; and
- provide one-on-one skills transfer during technical assistance missions.

The **key performance indicators** (main result) by which the Programme will measure its success in achieving this output is:

- Significantly improved outputs in at least 3 NSOs compared to 2002
- At least 50% of justifiable training requests met in current year or firm commitments made for the following year

#### *Output 1.2: Wider range of key indicators produced by NSSs*

The range and quality of key indicators in many PICTs are insufficient to support high-quality policy formulation and review. In particular, the high turnover and small number of staff in many smaller NSOs limit their ability to develop and maintain the skills needed to produce some of the more complex indicators (e.g. national accounts). The Statistics Programme aims to assist NSOs to produce a wider and more relevant range of key indicators.

#### **Main activities:**

- provide technical assistance to PICTs who have specific or specialist needs and lack the relevant skills to meet these needs; and
- provide one-on-one skills transfer during technical assistance missions.

#### **Key performance indicator:**

- At least 20% increase between 2002 and 2005 in the total number of agreed 'core indicators' published.

#### *Output 1.3: PICTs using technology effectively*

The production of official statistics involves processes that require considerable resources, such as in designing and printing data collection forms, data processing, editing, analysing and presenting results. With today's technology NSSs can handle such processes far more effectively and efficiently than previously, particularly to maintain or increase outputs despite shrinking staff resources. However, where consultants or staff have provided ad hoc solutions based on highly specialised software, problems have been created. The Statistics Programme aims for more positive results by promoting standard approaches

with software common throughout the region. In this way, skills and solutions will be more portable among NSSs, and NSOs can develop office-wide technological solutions.

**Main activities:**

- provide technical assistance to PICTs (where required) to develop major systems such as trade statistics databases, and websites; and
- provide specialist training in the application of computing technology in statistical systems, including database and website design.

**Key performance indicator:**

- at least 12 NSOs with major systems developed and/or supported in-house, based on standard software.
- number of NSOs using IT as their principal form of external data transfer

**Objective 2: Better dissemination of NSS outputs**

*Output 2.1: Use of a wider range of media and wider dissemination of key PICT information*

In the past, the extent to which statistical outputs have been disseminated has varied: reports were lost; publications were released in limited quantities; and planners and analysts were sometimes unaware of the range of unpublished data available on request. Some of these problems have been due to NSO budget limitations, which make the physical costs of distribution burdensome. The Programme will use its own resources to promote and improve the flow of key data within the region, such as through developing PRISM, and will encourage NSOs to explore with key users the potential for publishing key regional data in a wider variety of media as a means of reducing dissemination costs.

**Main activities:**

- establish PRISM;
- provide specialist training in website design and operation; and
- provide technical assistance to PICTs (where required) to develop websites.

**Key performance indicator:**

- PRISM established and maintained by April 2004.
- At least 15 NSOs with their own statistical website operational and maintained

*Output 2.2: Improved awareness among key stakeholders of the range of information available*

While actively encouraging NSSs to liaise more effectively with key users about their data needs and the best means to meet them, the Programme will promote more dialogue between NSSs and key stakeholders regarding the full range and characteristics of information available to users. In this way, key stakeholders will be aware of both the potential availability of unpublished data and the relationships among major datasets, including any limitations. The metadata stored on PRISM will form a key part of this strategy, enabling users to monitor data availability and expected release dates and to make queries directly to the data producers.

**Main activities:**

- establish PRISM, including a range of supplementary information about underlying concepts, timeliness and official contact points; and

- liaise with NSOs and other national, regional and international agencies to promote dialogue regarding data relationships and availability, including through
  - presentations at RMHS13 in 2003,
  - publication of regular newsletters to key stakeholders, detailing outputs produced in association with the Programme’s activities, and
  - use of the PacStats distribution list to disseminate information about key statistical developments, giving website addresses for key information available via the Internet.

**Key performance indicators:**

- a 50 per cent decrease in the number of requests to SPC for published information; and
- An upward trend in accesses of supplementary information stored in PRISM (by data type and key stakeholders)

*Output 2.3: Reduced delays in publication and dissemination of outputs*

Historically NSSs have sometimes released key information well after the data were initially available, often with the result that the information is less useful to planners and analysts. In some cases the delays have been due to resource constraints, such as staff shortages or lack of funds to meet printing costs. In other cases a lack of communication has meant the data producers were not aware that the data consumers regarded their outputs as particularly valuable.

The Statistics Programme will assist NSSs to resolve these issues by:

- promoting the potential for electronic release of data;
- liaising between NSSs and key information users; and
- storing supplementary information on PRISM that will advise users when data are available and provide direct contact with the data producers.

**Main activities:**

- provide a range of training programmes to equip NSOs with core and advanced skills in preparing information releases in electronic form, including through the Internet;
- provide technical assistance to PICTs (where required) to enhance and develop output systems, and improve general processing systems to reduce processing time; and
- establish PRISM so that it operates as an effective dissemination medium for the region.

**Key performance indicator :**

- key statistical indicators published on time.

**Objective 3: Better statistical co-ordination**

*Output 3.1: Country-specific classification systems with links to international standard classifications adopted and implemented*

Almost all statistical activities rely heavily on well-defined underlying classifications that define the concepts, scope and nature of component data items. Such classifications guide statisticians in collecting, processing and disseminating information. Moreover, they provide an essential guide to users on what that information represents and how it relates to outputs from other statistical processes.

All major classification systems have been developed as “international standards” through extensive consultations among a wide range of international, regional and national statistical agencies. There are

good reasons for NSSs to use international classifications as the basis for their own work wherever possible; for example, the World Customs Organisation's Harmonised System of Commodity Classification should be the basis for commodity classification in national tariff systems. However, because "international" classifications are the composite of a wide range of views and circumstances, they are not always appropriate in classifying information that reflects the unique characteristics of the Pacific region. The Statistics Programme will assist NSSs to adapt international standards to meet national and regional needs while maintaining links wherever possible with international standards.

**Main activities:**

- provide PICTs with specialist technical advice on classification systems;
- provide specialist technical assistance to integrate existing classifications and country-specific classifications, which are developed where appropriate; and
- use PRISM to store and link to national and international classification systems.

**Key performance indicator :**

- 80 per cent of NSSs with PICT-specific classification systems on PRISM by 2005

*Output 3.2: Better co-ordination between NSSs and international agencies/organisations involved in statistical activities in PICTs*

The NSOs have indicated consistently at RMHSs that they want the Statistics Programme to act as a regional conduit between them and international agencies, including in a co-ordinating role to maximise the effectiveness of statistical assistance to the region. Fulfilling this role is difficult given the Programme's limited resources and the diverse international objectives and activities that impact on the region. At present the Programme liaises with agencies known to be involved with regional statistical activities, particularly in promoting the benefit of utilising the Programme for its regional experience and as a joint partner in any training and technical assistance to NSSs. The Programme also ensures that agencies in the region are aware of its planned activities, such as by publishing them on the SPC website and detailing activities in regular newsletters and PacStats communications.

**Main activities:**

- maintain close collaboration among SPC, NSSs and international agencies; and
- provide staff and resources for joint training programmes, and promoting the use of region-specific examples in training materials.

**Key performance indicator :**

- At least 8 joint statistical activities in PICTs that involve SPC and International Agencies in the period 2003-2005

*Output 3.3: Improved advocacy on behalf of NSSs in the region*

Country delegates to successive RMHSs have requested that the Statistics Programme, as part of the international liaison role that NSOs have assigned to it, represent the region at appropriate international statistical gatherings. In particular, there is a concern that programmes and reviews for the "Asia-Pacific region" should not simply reflect the needs and conditions of the vastly more populous Asian component of the region. To counter this they have assigned a high priority to SPC attendance at the annual statistics meetings at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP, SIAP), where participation will encourage these organisations to give due consideration to the statistical needs of PICTs in their planning. Attendance at other

international forums, such as the annual meetings of the United Nations Statistical Commission, and participation in regional and international workshops and seminars are decided on a case-by-case basis, with consideration of funding and the potential impact of each event on the region's NSSs.

**Main activities:**

- attend and represent the region's NSSs at relevant forums (e.g. SIAP); and
- promote regional statistical needs and priorities through electronic media such as PacStats, PRISM and personal communications.

**Key performance indicator :**

- an increase in the number of SPC's submissions and representations to regional meetings and organisations on behalf of PICTs.

## **8 Reporting, Monitoring & Evaluation**

Annual progress reports and workplans are provided to SPC Executive and donors, where applicable, with a six-monthly update. (This is in addition to specific project reports and any exception reporting.) Heads of agency and technical meetings have the opportunity to examine and comment on the programme's work and the programme is monitored annually by Conference or CRGA. Independent reviewers evaluate the programme every few years as part of SPC's programme of regular reviews.

Where necessary, revised baselines will be identified prior to the end of 2002. Annual surveys to measure the extent of user satisfaction will provide additional means of verifying the Programme's performance against high level objectives.

## **9 Partnerships and Resources**

The Programme comprises of the Statistician, Assistant Statistician, Statistical Training Specialist, Statistical Research Officer and Programme Assistant. The Programme is funded through a combination of core budget – which covers the salaries and allowances of the Statistician and Programme Assistant, duty travel and some activity costs – and non-core funding, principally from Australia and New Zealand. Taiwan/Republic of China often provides additional funds for training attachments and specialised training courses.

At the time of writing this plan (July 2002), the Programme has secured funding from DFID for an additional position of Internet Programmer/Developer as part of the development of a Pacific Regional Information System (PRISM). This position will be for a fixed 12 months and will then give way to a designated Pacific Islander position of Database Manager. This latter position will be funded by DFID for the first 12 months, but other donor support will be needed for it to continue after the end of the PRISM project in April 2004.

**Appendix 1 : Summary of formal statistical training activities by SPC Statistics Programme  
1996-2002**

Host PICT	SOAP	DA&RW	CANSO	Sub-Regional Training	Trainees	Country workshops
<b>American Samoa</b>	1996	2000				
<b>Cook Is</b>		1999			1999 (2) 2000 (1) 2001 (1)	1996 Statistics for women leaders 2001 Indicators for Gender and Development
<b>FSM</b>		1997	1999		1999 (1)	
<b>Fiji</b>	1999			2001 Statistics management 2001 National Accounts (ESCAP) 2002 Sample surveys (SIAP) 2002 Survey Estimates	2002 (2)	
<b>French Polynesia</b>						
<b>Guam</b>	1997	1999		2000 Price Indexes		
<b>Kiribati</b>		1997	1999		2000 (2)	
<b>Marshall Islands</b>		2002				
<b>Nauru</b>	2000					
<b>New Caledonia</b>						
<b>Niue</b>	1995					
<b>CNMI</b>		1996 1998	2002			
<b>Palau</b>	1997	2000			2000 (1)	
<b>PNG</b>	1997 1998	2002				
<b>Samoa</b>	1998		2000		1999 (2) 2001 (1)	2001 Economic Statistics
<b>Solomon Islands</b>	1998					
<b>Tokelau</b>						
<b>Tonga</b>		1998			1999 (1)	
<b>Tuvalu</b>	2001	1998				
<b>Vanuatu</b>	1999	1997 2001	2000	2001 (ESCAP) Environment Stats 2001 (ESCAP) Trade Statistics	1999 (1)	
<b>Wallis and Futuna (in French)</b>	2000					

SOAP = Survey Operations and Procedures (5 weeks, part time); DA&RW = Data Analysis and Report Writing (4 weeks, full time)  
 CANSO = Computer Applications for NSOs (2 weeks, full-time); Trainees are full-time attachments to SPC Statistics in Nouméa  
 All courses are open to all relevant government employees, and are tailored to individual country needs (including use of live data).  
 The Programme also aims for maximum skills transfer to counterparts during technical assistance missions.