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**Professional Training of Official Statisticians
Some Views on Regional and Global Partnerships**

by

Rudolf Teekens

**TES Institute
Luxembourg**

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1 Strategic Issues in Professional Training

1.1 GENERAL CONTEXT

The formal educational system as it exists at present in Europe and elsewhere takes long gestation periods to adapt the system to new scientific and technological developments and the resulting new requirements of the labour market. Training received five or ten years ago becomes quickly obsolete and may not match the requirements of today. Experience in the 1950s and 1960s has shown that it is extremely difficult if not impossible to make long-term forecasts of the skill requirements in the labour market. It is now being acknowledged by both private and public institutions that they have an active role to play in the shortening of the reaction time between changing labour force requirements and training and retraining of their staff. With the acceleration of technological change, which is occurring at a global scale, recurrent training schemes, including vocational and professional training, have become indispensable instruments in order to maintain high output standards and to stay competitive in a rapidly changing environment.

1.2 STATISTICIANS

How can National Statistical Institutes respond adequately to the challenges ahead? Before trying to give answers to this question, one should look at the specific context in some detail.

Every National Statistical Institute is faced with its specific problems in competence building and staff development related to the national labour market situation, the national education system and its budget constraints. There will be little argument that each National Statistical Institute needs its vocational training and staff development programme to respond adequately to a changing environment, subject to these national constraints. In spite of differences in the national context, the design, the timely readjustment and the implementation of vocational training and staff development programmes are bound to raise similar problems in the various countries.

It has been long recognised that the continuing increase of interdependency at a global level is calling for the harmonisation of approaches and methodologies in statistical work. The initiative of Eurostat to start in 1990 the project "Training of European Statisticians" demonstrated a concern that vocational training of statisticians should also be placed on the international agenda and that efforts should start to define a common vocational training agenda.

After more than ten years of experience of international professional training in Europe it is felt that time has come to sound out the possibility of partnership in statistical training at a global level.

2 The European Experience

2.1 SHORT HISTORY OF THE TES INSTITUTE

In order to better understand the present context we present here a short history of the TES Institute, an overview of the process leading to its creation and a brief account of the recent developments.

After consultation with the Member States of the – then – European Community, Eurostat started in 1990 the project “Training of European Statisticians” (TES). During the first years of operation the TES Project was entirely focussed on the execution of an annual professional training programme for statisticians from the European Union and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and to a limited extent from the Central European countries. In this phase the programme was 100% subsidised by Eurostat. Soon after the creation of the TES Programme, its financing ceased to be entirely based on an Eurostat subsidy: The National Statistical Institutes started to pay registration fees. Moreover, the registration and tuition fees of participants from other countries outside the EU/EFTA zone were paid for through other sources, like the Phare programme. On top of the annual subsidised programme (to be referred to below as the CORE programme) the team running the TES Project got more and more involved in the organisation of additional courses for Central European countries and later also the Mediterranean Basin countries and other countries. These courses generate important economies of scale and help to capitalise on the initial development costs.

Six years after Eurostat created the project “Training of European Statisticians” Statistical Offices of the Member States of the European Union and EFTA decided to formalise their commitment to this project by creating the TES Institute. The TES Institute is a non-profit association of National Statistical Institutes.

In May 2002 the Member States decided to further formalise their long-term commitment to the international training and to strengthen the legal structure of their common international training and broaden the geographical scope of the training. For that purpose a non-profit foundation was created, called “European Training and Research Institute for Official Statistics” (ETRIOS). The Board of Governors of ETRIOS consists of the representatives of all Members States of the EU and the EFTA and the European Commission. As a rule the Directors General of the National Statistical Institutes are the representatives of the Member States. This new foundation will gradually take over the activities from the TES Institute. It is expected that by 2004 all current and future activities inside and outside Europe will have been transferred to the ETRIOS foundation.

2.2 THE MISSION OF THE TES INSTITUTE

The broad goals of the TES Institute are:

1. To provide statisticians in the civil service and other interested parties with training courses related to official statistics in the European Community in the context of the European Statistical System;
2. The collection and development of knowledge regarding official statistics in the European Community or in relation to it.

The organisation of training courses is one of the main activities foreseen to achieve these goals.

The execution of the annual training programme in the context of Eurostat's project "Training of European Statisticians" has been the centrepiece of these training activities, but certainly not the only one. The organisation and the execution of the Special Courses Programme for the countries of Central Europe, the Mediterranean Basin and other regions constitutes the second main task of the TES Institute and in the third place the Institute provides consultancy on the set-up and organisation of regional training centres in a number of CIS countries.

Thus, the mission of the TES has been training and consultancy on training for statisticians, both on a subsidy basis and on contract basis. The commissioning agents defined their broad objectives and general guidelines about the desired output and the responsibility of the TES Institute has been to translate these orientations into concrete and high quality course programmes or individual courses which correspond to the demands of the commissioning agents.

The courses offered by the TES Institute may be for an international audience (international courses) or for a national audience (in-country courses). Apart from the traditional face-to-face courses the TES Institute is developing online courses in various fields. The TES Institute will also continue developing Learning Aids (manuals both on paper and online, course material, CD-ROMs, virtual libraries, etc.). Finally, the TES Institute will give a broader interpretation to its mission and become an institution that not only provides training courses but also facilitates learning in a wide sense.

It may do so by offering facilities and conditions to receive a limited number of scholars on short sabbatical leaves from their institutes or universities, thus enabling them to pursue in an international context a study on a specific subject, to work together with a colleague on the finalisation of a paper, etc.

In all its services the TES Institute will be complementary to the services offered by its members at national level. The complementarity will mainly concern typical aspects of the European Statistical System, the offering of international contacts and exchange and the international dissemination of best practices across Europe and other regions.

Hence, the TES Institute offers the following types of services:

- International Courses

- In-country Courses
- Consultancy
- Learning Aids
- International Research Facility

The international and in-country courses cover the following areas:

- Data Collection and Survey Methodology
- Official Statistics (Economic)
- Official Statistics (Social)
- Publication and Dissemination of Statistics
- Statistics and their Use in Society
- Management in a Statistical Institute
- Applied Statistical Analysis
- Statistical Information Systems

The interested reader may obtain detailed information about the individual courses in each of the above fields through the website of the TES Institute: www.tes.lu.

2.3 THE TES INSTITUTE AND EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP

The main partners of the TES Institute are the National Statistical Institutes, Eurostat and Universities. The character of this partnership and the symbiosis between the partners is worthwhile to look at. The National Statistical Institutes (and other government agencies employing official statisticians) are both requesting training for their employees and are reservoirs of expertise from which trainers can be recruited. This double role is essential in evaluating the partnership.

The applied character of the professional training provided through the TES Institute requires in the first place practitioners from the work floor but a sound theoretical underpinning is also an indispensable element. This is why Universities are part of the network.

Since training is not the main mandate of Statistical Offices, the TES Institute comes in as the partner which organises the training courses, both with respect to academic content and training method on the one hand and all logistic arrangements on the other. The trainers from the Statistical Institutes and the Universities are working with the TES Institute on the basis of special service contracts concluded for each training course separately. The pooling of training resources from various National Statistical Institutes reduces considerably the pressure on the individual institutes.

The other role of the TES Institute is to monitor the quality of the training courses offered in its various programmes. This is done through “hot” evaluations by the participants at the end of the courses and by feedbacks from client organisations on the medium term effect of training on the performance of the participants on the work floor.

2.4 TRAINING PHILOSOPHY OF THE TES INSTITUTE

As mentioned above, the essential ingredient of the training in the TES Institute is the applied character of the courses, objective of the training being that it offers immediate support for the participant in the execution of his/her daily tasks.

The courses make use of the fact that the participants are adult persons with a professional background in applied official statistics. The participants attending the TES courses are asked well before the start of the course about their educational background, their work area, the problems they encounter in their work and the expectations they have in relation to the course. Moreover, for many courses participants are asked to provide case studies or statistical data related to their daily work. This material is studied by the course staff and discussed during the course.

Apart from the necessary theoretical background TES courses are about exchange of experience on how to apply theoretical concepts to solve day-to-day practical problems in the area of official statistics. It has been this formula which, together with a severe quality management, is considered as the key to the success of the TES Institute.

3 Regional and Global Partnership in Training for Official Statisticians

3.1 MOTIVATION

Partnership in training of official statisticians is understood to be a form of committed co-operation between National Statistical Institutes, International Statistical Agencies, Professional Training Institutes for Statisticians and academic institutions in order to set up training programmes and training aids and to promote exchange as a learning tool.

Why is partnership in training of official statisticians attractive? In my view the answer is affirmative for a number of reasons that vary from institutional to economic arguments. The environment in which official statisticians work is characterised by increasing international contacts, an ever increasing need to provide harmonised and thus internationally comparable statistics and growing competition from other information providers. Indeed, the information society is increasingly generating statistical information originating from outside the National Statistical Offices. If these Offices are to be the cornerstones of independence, impartiality and quality in statistics, they have to invest in people, they have to train their staff in order to be able to provide statistical services that can meet internationally accepted quality standards.

Moreover, the target group of official statisticians is a relative small target group, particularly at a national level. Therefore it often occurs that the organisation of a course in a specific domain of official statistics is not economically viable when it is done at national level. The experience in Europe has shown that courses organised for an international audience are the appropriate answer.

A third reason to stimulate global partnership is the fact that in the development of new statistical techniques or methodologies often specialisations among statistical offices and/or universities are occurring. It is through international training networks that these “best practices” can be disseminated among countries.

3.2 THE CHARACTER OF THE PARTNERSHIPS

This paper concentrates on the model for a partnership for training of official statisticians as it was developed by the TES Institute in the European context, not because it is seen as the best model for all times and all places but simply because it worked very well and it has shown very satisfactory results. The model will be used in this paper as a reference framework.

The model for partnership takes as a starting point that National Statistical Offices as well as International Statistical Organisations are the essential reservoirs of expertise in official statistics.

At the same time the model acknowledges that these organisations do not all have the in-house training capability necessary for development and professional training of their own staff. Amongst other things, this capability depends critically on the size of the organisation.

The above observation, together with the need for dissemination of best practice, the need for harmonisation and the need of international and regional exchange of experience at working level, constitute the basic arguments for international pooling of statistical expertise in the context of regional and global training of official statisticians.

Our European experience has taught us that statistical offices are not equipped for international statistical training and that they are not willing or able to invest in the academic and logistic organisation of international training.

Regional training institutions can fill this gap successfully by playing the role of brokers of statistical expertise at regional level. Co-operation between different regional training institutions can make them clearinghouses of expertise in statistics at a global level.

3.3 PREREQUISITES FOR THE SET-UP OF PARTNERSHIPS

The partners are the National and International Statistical Institutes, academic institutions with expertise in areas relevant for official statistics and one or more regional training institutions for official statistics.

The fundamental prerequisite is the commitment of the National and International Statistical Institutes to both use the partnership for the training of their staff and make their experts available as trainers.

The activities covered under the partnership can vary from classroom training, on-the-job training through exchange programmes and online training through the Internet.

Finally, the partnership should have a sound financial basis. The European experience has shown that with a flexible set-up the partnership may embark in an extensive training programme at affordable costs.

3.4 CONDITIONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF PARTNERSHIPS

The conditions for success are:

- The existence of a business plan that outlines the role and responsibility of each of the partners and demonstrates the financial viability;
- The existence of a common philosophy towards professional training and quality aspects of training;
- The identification of mutual interests;
- The existence of communication channels between the partners enabling swift follow-up of decisions and implementation of actions and procedures;
- The existence of platforms for the exchange of experiences between the trainers (training methods, technology, etc.)

4 Proposals on Future Global Partnerships

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Although it may be thought that global partnerships may function in a less formal framework than the one required for regional frameworks, it is argued here that the prerequisites for a the successful set-up and implementation of partnerships for training of official statisticians basically apply *both* to regional and global partnerships.

The suggestions outlined below focus on three types of partnerships in which the TES Institute may engage. In the first place one may look at a partnership with a regional statistical training institute (e.g. SIAP), the second possibility is to engage in a common training project with a training institution in a particular country and finally, the TES Institute may conduct consultancy activities aimed at creating training organisation in a particular country or region.

If we want to move towards effective global partnerships for training of official statisticians, the issue of funding should be addressed in an early stage. In de views of the TES Institute all possible options should be analysed. Without intending to eliminate other sources of financing it seems that the proposed partnerships are aiming at achieving exactly the same objectives as set out by the World Bank for the Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building (TFSCB) and perfectly in line with the PARIS21 vision. Below we reproduced the text of the overview of this trust fund as can be found in the World Bank site www.worldbank.org/data/tas/TFSCB-Procgd.htm:

“The Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building (TFSCB) has been established by the Development Data Group of the World Bank to strengthen the capacity of statistical systems in developing countries. It provides a global facility, administered by the World Bank on behalf of donors, to make investments at the national, regional and global levels to improve the collection, processing, analysis, storage, dissemination and use of timely, good quality statistics to support poverty reduction and economic and social development. The trust fund is part of the worldwide effort to reduce poverty by improving both the supply of and demand for statistical data and so fostering a culture of evidence-based decision making at all levels. The primary target countries for assistance from the trust fund are those that are either currently involved in the PRSP process or are expected to be so within the next three years. By the end of the second year of operation of the fund it is expected that PRSP countries will make up more than 60 per cent of all country projects.

In conjunction with national governments, the programs of bilateral donors as well as other international initiatives, TFSCB provides a practical mechanism to achieve the PARIS21 vision, that is, to develop effective and efficient national statistical systems and to promote a culture of evidence-based decision-making. In line with the priorities identified by the contributing donors, the emphasis is on strengthening statistical systems in support of national poverty reduction strategies. It is anticipated that the majority of projects financed by the fund will, over time, be identified through PARIS21 processes, in particular by regional and national meetings.”

4.2 PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE SIAP AND THE TES INSTITUTE

In the view of the TES Institute the partnership with the SIAP should aim at the strengthening of the statistical capacity in the region enhancing the training facilities in the region and promoting international exchange between statisticians.

The potential for concrete co-operation between the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) and the Training of European Statisticians Institute (TES) is in my view vast and may cover the following actions:

- Joint training courses aimed at satisfying the training needs in the region;
- TES training courses on best practices outside the region;
- Joint development of manuals and other training material;
- Creating discussion forums to enable trainers to exchange experiences in training method and training technology;
- The TES Institute providing the SIAP and its members access to on-line courses for official statisticians;
- Joint “Training of the Trainers” programmes in various key areas of official statistics, like national accounts, data collection methodology, poverty statistics, business registers, etc.

- Admission of statisticians from the region to the current training programmes of the TES Institute.

5 Concluding Remarks

In this paper we have tried to provide a brief picture about the way training of statisticians has been organised in partnership with the European National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat.

We believe that this type of regional partnership has a number of virtues that make it worthwhile to analyse for application elsewhere.

As the European professional training programme for official statisticians has come to maturity, we feel that we should reach out to other regions to start building global partnerships that may provide answers to new challenges to the international community of official statisticians.