Report of 15th Management Seminar (Webinar) for Heads of National Statistical Offices in Asia and the Pacific:

National statistical systems: responding to the COVID 19 crisis and building better for the future

The 15th Management Seminar for Heads of National Statistical Offices in Asia and the Pacific on the theme "National statistical systems: responding to the Covid-19 crises ad building better for the future" was held virtually on 3-4 December 2020.

Introduction

The Seminar brought together representatives of statistical offices from national, regional and international organizations and research institutes. The main objective of the seminar was to determine effective approaches to statistical activities, including capacity building, and the role of chief statisticians in implementing these new approaches in the context of unforeseen crises such as the current pandemic. In particular, the seminar focused on the role of the Chief Statistician and specifically addressed the following issues:

- New activities and outputs that the national statistical system produce as a direct response to data needs in the crisis, including building statistical literacy.
- Legal and regulatory framework updates necessary to respond to the new demands and working environment.
- Issues around adaptation of working methods in a crisis to ensure the continuation of the work programme of the national statistical system in a crisis situation including development of and training in new methods (i.e. less reliance on traditional surveys and censuses and shifting towards using administrative data, big data, geospatial data and others)
- Ensuring sustainable and long-term capacity development in times of crisis
- Discussion on how countries have adapted their capacity development strategies during the COVID19 pandemic

Seminar programme and presentations are available at:
http://www.unsiap.or.jp/programmes/ms_materials/ms15.html

Main recommendations and outcomes are included in the next section with further details in the subsequent sections.

Main conclusions and recommendations

Overall impact and response to Covid-19 crises by NSS (National Statistical System)

The current crisis has significantly altered the business operations of NSOs/NSSs in the region. Countries have faced several challenges including: inability to conduct face-to-face surveys;

reduction in resources and hence need to reallocate resources; additional expenses for personal protection equipment and other unexpected costs; and, increased demands for additional/more granular data. Furthermore, inadequate ICT (Information Communications Technology) equipment and infrastructure has been the main constraint for working from home. Most of NSOs (National Statistics Offices) in the region did not have a crisis management plan in place, which complicated the initial responses by the NSOs.

While business operations are different now, regular outputs have not been significantly impacted. Most countries continue to disseminate high visibility/high demand outputs such as quarterly GDP and monthly CPI. Major statistical undertakings such as censuses have been postponed in some cases or have been adapted to the current situation.

In adopting to the situation countries took several innovative approaches and/or scaled up piloted approaches. There was an increased use of web surveys and telephone surveys. Another useful approach to surveys was to work closely with regional and local officers in the collection of data. Many countries also scaled up the use of non-traditional data sources (e.g., administrative data and big data) to meet their mandates and new demands.

The current crisis has further highlighted the need for closer collaboration with other institutions in the NSS, other NSOs in the region and international organization. Furthermore, collaborations with the private sector/NGO and other actors in the data ecosystem also need to increase. Scaling up the use of administrative data and big data needs to be prioritized and, in this regard, methodological guidance needs to be developed by international organizations.

The role of NSOs and chief statisticians continue to evolve. The NSO and the chief statisticians need to be more visible, particularly regarding informing the public debate with high quality statistics. This requires closer collaboration with an expanded number of user groups, in particular the media and the public at large. Moreover, given the expanded data ecosystem (including more data provider and data users), it is incumbent upon the NSO and the chief statistician to take on the role of data stewards for the larger NSS providing advice and setting standards for good statistical practices. To facilitate the evolving role of the NSO and the chief statistician, there is a need in many countries to update the legislative framework to among others, facilitate access to big data and citizen generated data by the NSO/NSS.

Capacity development during the current crises and future planning

Another area of work of the NSO/NSS that has seen significant changes has been training and capacity building. As expected, there has been an increase in online/distance learning. However, there is a need to produce trainings that are of good pedagogical quality to ensure uptake of knowledge by participants. An area of emphasis needs to be the building of capacity across NSS for proper use of administrative data (including administrative registers) and big data. Training materials should be shared to the extent possible between national, regional, and global institutions.

Some good practices have been identified when shifting to online training including: use of new technological tools which allow for virtual trainings to have similar features to in person training such as continuous interactions with participants and virtual breakrooms for small group work; for each online training course put together teams comprised of a supervisor, facilitator and IT staff to ensure a smooth user experience; and, utilize feedback and participant inputs to improve content and delivery of online trainings. It should be noted that infrastructure/software costs need to be considered when developing virtual trainings.

With the changing data demands and compilation approaches, there is a need to collaborate with experts (in other NSS agencies as well as outside of the NSS) and partners (e.g., other NSS agencies, academia, and private sector) in developing new courses that are accessible and demand driven. Some of the more pressing training needs of NSOs in the region include: training on data collection (e.g., web scrapping, satellite images and GIS, social media data); training on big data tools and software (e.g., R, Python, Hadoop); and, training on data analysis (e.g., machine learning, artificial intelligence, text analysis, sentiment analysis). Trainings would also benefit by including case studies based on real data. Quality assurance capacity building remains an issue when using new data sources to produce official statistics; there is a need for methodological guidance by international organization in this area.

The need for capacity building of staff, on one hand, to better communicate statistics and different user group, on the other hand, to properly understand statistics was also highlighted. This is especially important in the context of the current crisis given all the various statistics in the public space coming from different sources. Different outputs in different format and of varying technical detail need to be produced in order to meet the needs of different user groups. For many countries, translating materials to local languages also is an important step to ensure uptake of the outputs.

To achieve these outputs, it is important to train staff in communication and enhance their ability to draft narratives around the data and the information that the data conveys. More broadly, communication/user engagement strategies can serve as a useful tool in order to have a focused approach to reaching out to the different user groups. In many statistical offices, it is necessary to collaborate with outside experts to develop such strategies as well as build capacities of staff to interact more effectively with other user groups, especially the press.

Seminar documents:

Annex 1. Concept note

Annex 2. Programme

Annex 3. List of participants

Presentations and other details are available on the website of SIAP at the following link:

http://www.unsiap.or.jp/programmes/ms_materials/ms15.html

Annex 1.

Fifteenth Management Seminar (Webinar) for the Heads of National Statistical Offices in Asia and the Pacific

National statistical systems: responding to the COVID 19 crisis and building better for the future

3-4 December 2020, Online

CONCEPT NOTE

Collaborating agencies: United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific **(SIAP)**; Statistics Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific **(SD ESCAP)**; United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs **(UNSD);** The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century **(PARIS21)**.

1. Background

As with all public services, national statistical systems have been greatly impacted by the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. 65% of NSOs responding to a recent survey by UNSD and the World Bank have either fully or partially closed their headquarters[1]. Furthermore, almost all NSOs have either fully or partially stopped conducting face to face surveys.

The current crisis has led to an increase in data demands while at the same time hindered the ability of NSO to produce data (including data that are part of regular production) due to lack of preparedness, insufficient capacity and resource constraints. Most countries are facing serious difficulties in administering regular surveys which provide significant data for official statistics. Under COVID-19, various new data such as number of infections, number of patients and population are required by policy makers, analysts in government, private sector, journalists and the public at large. Such data also need to be made available at high frequency and disaggregated by several factors including severity of infections, sex, age and location.

The COVID-19 crisis has propelled data and statistics into the spotlight. The importance of accurate, reliable and timely data in understanding and managing the crisis has become more apparent by the day,

as decision-makers across the world have had to make quick and unprecedented decisions affecting millions of people spread across the globe. In parallel, the international community of those working to produce and disseminate these data has had to react at lightning speed to meet the urgent demands for new types of data to support potentially critical lifesaving decisions. The work of the NSS, and the chief statistician, is not complete once data has been compiled. A relevant component of the response to the pandemic is the need to increase statistical literacy, in particular among journalists and the public at large, to ensure that data is properly understood and not misused.

In this context, chief statisticians as leaders of the NSS have a particularly important role to play in laying out the vision for the national statistical systems and implementing that vision when adopting and responding to crisis. Some guidance to chief statisticians is available from Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems[2]. Further elaborations and sharing of experiences are required in order to provide chief statisticians more tools to respond to the current crises' environment.

2. Objectives

The main objective of the seminar is to determine effective approaches to statistical activities, including capacity building, and the role of chief statisticians in implementing these new approaches in the context of unforeseen crises such as the current pandemic. Participants will share their views on approaches, including methodologies to be adopted, for development of statistical capacity keeping in view the responsibility to produce statistics that are part of regular production including those need for monitoring the sustainable development goals in times of crisis. The seminar shall focus on the role of the Chief Statistician and specifically address the following issues:

- New activities and outputs that the national statistical system produces as a direct response to data needs in the crisis, including building statistical literacy.
- Legal and regulatory framework updates necessary to respond to the new demands and working environment
- Issues around adaptation of working methods in a crisis to ensure the continuation of the work programme of the national statistical system in a crisis situation including development of and training in new methods (i.e. less reliance on traditional surveys and censuses and shifting towards using administrative data, big data, geospatial data and others)
- Ensuring sustainable and long-term capacity development in times of crisis
- Discussion on how countries have adapted their capacity development strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic

3. Annotated agenda

Day 1: Overall impact and response to COVID-19 crises by NSS (Three hours)

Session 1: Experience sharing about the Statistical Activities during COVID-19 Crisis (Two hours)

Session 1 A: Sharing of experiences by countries on the continuation of regular activities, adoption of new activities and adaptation of existing activities due to COVID-19 Crisis and lessons learnt (2 hours)

> Panel of 5 countries- presentation of 10 minutes each followed by discussion and Q/A

Session 1 B: Information sharing by the UNSD, SD ESCAP, PARIS21, SIAP on statistical activities undertaken by the countries (1 hour)- globally and in the region (One hour)

Day 2: Capacity development during the current crises and future planning (Three hours)

Session 2: Capacity development to meet future Crisis

Session 2 A: Role played by Chief Statisticians in communication of data and improved statistical literacy during the Crisis (1 hour)

> Panel Discussion of 4 Chief Statisticians (5 minutes each)

Session 2 B: Capacity development activities undertaken by NSS and National Training Institutions to address the problems arising from the Crisis, especially need for developing data science skills including skills to handle big data (1 hour)

> Presentation by 4 countries/ training institutions (5 minutes each) followed by discussion and Q/A

Concluding Session

Recommendations

4. Target Participants

The seminar is designed for Heads of NSOs in the Asia-Pacific region.

5. Expected Output of the Seminar

The management seminar will be to:

    a. Identify good practices of leadership under the crisis
    b. Identify future steps that should be taken to lead sustained capacity development for the crisis

[1] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/covid19-response/covid19-nso-survey-report.pdf

See also "How COVID-19 is changing the world: a statistical perspective"

https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/covid19-report-ccsa.pdf

[2] See https://unstats.un.org/wiki/display/HSO/Handbook+Statistical+Organization. For more details on managing the statistical response to Covid-19 please see https://covid-19-response.unstatshub.org/

Annex 2.

15th Management Seminar for Heads of National Statistical Offices in Asia and the Pacific
National statistical systems: responding to the COVID 19 crisis and building better for the future

3-4 December 2020, Chiba, Japan

PROGRAMME

Tokyo Time	Sessions

14:00-14:30	**Opening**
	• Welcome message from ESCAP
	Mr. Kaveh Zahedi
	Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP
	• Welcome message from United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)
	Mr. Stefan Schweinfest
	Director, UNSD
	• Welcome message from PARIS21
	Mr. Johannes Jütting
	Executive Head, PARIS21
	• Objectives of the 15th SIAP Management Seminar
	Mr. Ashish Kumar
	Director, SIAP

DAY 1: Overall impact and response to Covid-19 crises by NSS , 3 December 2020		
	Session 1: Experience sharing about the Statistical Activities during Covid-19 Crisis	Interventions

| 14:30-16:15 | Session 1 A: Sharing of experiences by countries on the continuation of regular activities, adoption of new activities and adaptation of existing activities due to Covid-19 Crisis and lessons learnt | Session Moderator: **Mr. Tsumura Akira** *Director for International Statistical Affairs, Office of Director- General for Policy Planning on Statistical Standards, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan*

Presenters:
Mr. Chhime Tshering *Director, National Statistics Bureau, Bhutan*

Mr. Xian Zude *Deputy Commissioner, National Bureau of Statistics of China*

Mr. Suhariyanto *Chief Statistician BPS-Statistics Indonesia*

Mr. Javad Hosseinzadeh *Head, Statistical Centre of Iran*

Ms. Aishath Shahuda *Chief Statistician, National Bureau of Statistic, Maldives*

Mr. Gregory Oksenoyt *Director of International Statistics Department, Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service (ROSSTAT)* |
| Break | | |

16:30-17:45	Session 1 B: Information sharing by the UNSD, PARIS21, SD ESCAP and SIAP on statistical activities undertaken by the countries - globally and in the region	Session Moderator: **Mr. Tsumura Akira** *Director for International Statistical Affairs, Office of Director- General for Policy Planning on Statistical Standards, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan*
	1. Monitoring the state of statistical operations under the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region	Presenters: **Ms. Gemma Van Halderen** *Director, Statistics Division, ESCAP*
	2. Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems	**Mr. Ralf Becker** *Chief, Statistical Capacity Management Section, UNSD* **Mr. François Fonteneau** *Deputy Head, PARIS21*
	3. A Roadmap for Statistical Capacity Development 4.0	**Mr. Ashish Kumar** *Director, SIAP*
	4. Learning Management System (LMS)	
Day 2: Capacity development during the current crises and future planning , 4 December 2020		
14:00-15:15	*Session 2: Capacity development to meet future Crisis*	Interventions

	Session 2 A: Role played by Chief Statisticians in communication of data and improved statistical literacy during the Crisis	Session Moderator: **Ms. Gemma Van Halderen** *Director, Statistics Division, ESCAP* Presenters: **Ms. Shailja Sharma** *Director General, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, India* **Ms. I.R.Bandara** *Director General , Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka* **Mr. Mark Sowden** *Chief Executive, Stats NZ* **Mr. Mohd Uzir Mahidin** *Chief Statistician, Malaysia*
15:15-16:15	Session 2 B: Capacity development activities undertaken by NSS and National Training Institutions to address the problems arising from the Crisis, especially need for developing data science skills including skills to handle big data	Session Moderator: **Mr. Ashish Kumar** *Director, SIAP* Presenters: **Ms. Jeongran Kim** *Director of Training Planning Division, Republic of Korea* **Ms. Josefina V. Almeda** *Head, Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute* **Ms. Hataichanok Chinauparwat** *Director of Statistical Forecasting Division, National Statistical Office, Thailand*
	Break	
	Concluding Session	Presenters

16:45-17:05	Recommendations	**Mr. Ashish Kumar** *Director, SIAP*
17:05-17:15	**Closing** • Closing message **Mr. Ashish Kumar** *Director, SIAP*	

Annex 3.

List of Participants

Country	Name
Bangladesh	Mr Mohammad Tajul Islam
Bhutan	Mr Chhime Tshering
China	Ms Shaoying Song
	Mr Zude Xian
Georgia	Mr Gogita Todradze
Hong Kong, China	Ms Marion Shui-yu, Chan
India	Ms Shailja Sharma
	Mr Madan Mohan Hasija
Indonesia	Mr Suhariyanto
	Mr M. Habibullah
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Mr Seyed Nematollah Mirfallah Nassiri
Japan	Mr Akira Tsumura
	Mr Tetsuya Yoshida
	Ms Satoko Kouga
	Ms Keiko Maruyama
	Ms Saori Oshiro
	Ms Ayano Yoshinaga
Kazakhstan	Mr Zhasser Jarkinbayev
Kyrgyzstan	Ms Lolakhon Baimatova
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Ms Phetsamone Sone
Malaysia	Ms Nazaria Baharudin
	Mr Zainuddin Ahmad
	Ms Rozita Talha
	Ms Siti Asiah Ahmad
	Ms Norhayati Jantan
	Ms Betty Hasan
	Ms Aishath Shahuda
Mongolia	Ms Bayanchimeg Chilkhaasuren
Myanmar	Mr Htun Zaw
Nepal	Mr Hem Raj Regmi
New Zealand	Mr Mark Sowden
	Ms Rachael Milicich
Philippines	Ms Josefina V. Almeda
Republic of Korea	Mr Bong-su Choi
	Ms Jaemin Na

Russian Federation	Mr Gregory Oksenoyt
Singapore	Mr Eng Chuan Koh
Sri Lanka	Ms Indu R.Bandara
Thailand	Ms Hataichanok Chinauparwat
Timor-Leste	Mr Elias dos Santos Ferreira
	Mr Cesar Melito Dos Santos Martins
Turkey	Mr Ahmet Kürşad Dosdogru
Turkmenistan	Ms Bagtygul Gurbanova
	Mr Kadyr Kadyrov
United Kingdom	Mr Craig Irwin
Uzbekistan	Mr Bakhodir Begalov
	Mr Odiljon Mamadaliev
Viet Nam	Mr Pham Quang Vinh
	Ms Thi Thanh Ha Hoang
	Mr Van Tuan Pham
ADB	Mr Mahinthan Joseph Mariasingham
FAO	Ms Sangita Dubey
ITU	Mr Ashish Narayan
ASEAN	Mr Anang Laksono
SESRIC	Mr Atilla Karaman
	Ms Nenden Octavarulia Shanty
UNICEF	Mr Jayachandran Vasudevan
University of the Philippines	Ms Zita Villa Juan Albacea
UNSD	Mr Stefan Schweinfest
	Mr Ralf Becker
PARIS21	Mr Johannes Jütting
	Mr François Fonteneau
ESCAP	Mr Kaveh Zahedi
	Ms Gemma Van Halderen
	Ms Rikke Munk Hansen
SIAP	Mr Ashish Kumar
	Mr Makoto Shimizu
	Mr Eunkoo Lee
	Ms Pinar Ucar
	Mr Sokol Vako
	Mr Christophe Bontemps
	Ms Ni Thein
	Ms Eunyoung Lee
	Ms Akiyo Shibuya

	Mr Shuji Fukuyama
	Ms Jing Zhao