

HIGH-LEVEL FORUM ON STRATEGIC PLANNING IN STATISTICS FOR EAST AND NORTH-EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

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SESSION 1 –

The Current Status of Strategic Statistical Planning : An Overview

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STRATEGIC PLANNING IN STATISTICS

Strategic planning in statistics has always existed, in one form or another, in all the countries concerned. In reviewing such endeavour, we may wish to look at

- 1) The framework within which planning is performed;
- 2) The planning process;
- 3) The plan;
- 4) The launching and monitoring of plan implementation; and
- 5) The mechanism for constantly improving the planning process

The Framework within which Planning is Performed

On this, we have to take account of the *specific political, legal and administrative frameworks* of the country in question. We certainly hope to see strong *political support and commitment*, adequate *legal provisions* and effective *administrative procedures* in regard to statistical activities.

These factors are interactive, though. If it can be shown that statistics do contribute to the formulation, decision-making and implementation of national development policies and the country's administration, other parties will actively co-operate and render support.

Anyhow, we should involve *partners, beneficiaries and stakeholders* as far as possible in the planning process; and try to get statistical planning integrated into the

national planning mechanism.

Hopefully there are already general *consultation and consensus-reaching mechanisms* in place which can be deployed for the statistical planning purpose. Otherwise, appropriate platforms should be created specially to cater for that.

The Planning Process

The *strategic* approach to planning is advocated. This would involve multi-level planning activities. We need to decide at various levels what are the right things to do before we decide on how to do those things right.

Of utmost importance is the devising of strategies to create a *favourable environment* for statistical development and operation. For example, deliberating how to generate community trust and support for survey activities, how to make required technical expertise available, and so on.

International standards, recommendations and experiences should obviously be drawn on. In adopting them, the country's statistical data will become internationally comparable and many users do consider this a very important aspect. Moreover, a lot of wisdom and lessons learnt are embodied there and it is obviously very beneficial to draw on them. Nevertheless, there are circumstances where some modifications are indeed needed before an external model is adopted locally.

Statistics can be costly commodities and hence *result-based management principles* should be incorporated into the planning process. Efficiency and value-for-money considerations should always be made.

The Plan

The contents of the plan should address, *inter alia*, the following areas:

- 1) The establishment and maintenance of a sound statistical infrastructure (statistical registers; statistical classifications; geographical demarcations; GIS (Geographical Information Systems); ICT (Information and Communications) facilities; statistical human resources; and so on);
- 2) The delineation of programme areas, the identification of their links and the devise

- of measures to achieve comprehensiveness and coherence of statistical data produced across the entire National Statistical System (NSS);
- 3) How both immediate and long-term data needs are respectively catered for;
 - 4) Appropriate allocation of responsibilities to different levels of action parties, in terms of subject matter and in terms of geographical levels; and
 - 5) How financial and other resources are to be secured.

Launching and Monitoring of Plan Implementation

Since planning relates to what we will do in the future, a plan often involves changes to be made to the current situation. "*Change management*" is therefore a particularly important subject to ensure success when plans are put to implementation.

Plans may be well made and well promulgated but often players do not follow the plan, either intentionally or unintentionally. Hence a *monitoring and control mechanism* has to be created and invoked to ensure that actions are taken in accordance with the plan.

It is of course true that during plan implementation there is often the need to make some *adjustments* to cater for circumstances not visualized at the planning stage. They should be made as necessary, rather than not made since deviation from the plan is implied. Where circumstances really have changed drastically, then a revised plan should be made.

Planning performance indicators are to be compiled and analyzed. Effective *feedback channels* should exist and be well utilized.

The Mechanism for Constantly Improving the Planning Process

The planning process will re-start at an appropriate time for an updated plan to be prepared. Meanwhile, the process itself should be subject to improvements based on the lessons learnt from previous rounds of planning and plan implementation.

Good documentation is essential to ensure that record is kept on what has been done, what has been going well and what has not gone so well. It is a pre-requisite to being able to learn from one's own experience.

Then, there is ample experience elsewhere which are useful. The benefits of

learning from other countries' experiences should not be neglected.

From a more technical angle, skills for *knowledge management* should be developed and applied, which also encompasses knowledge sharing and knowledge creation besides knowledge depository. And, more importantly, a culture conducive to good knowledge management should be nurtured.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF STRATEGIC STATISTICAL PLANNING

It is observed that countries generally appreciate the importance of evidence-based policy making and the significant place of statistics in such policy processes. Broad *political support* is obvious but the degree of firmness in *political commitment* is less certain.

We need statistics not only to *support* actions that we fully feel should be taken, but also to *illuminate* the country's way forward in development. Hence, where statistics do not paint a picture which the parties concerned wish to see, or which they believe intuitively, they should still back up the statistical procedures, provided of course the data are truly of proper quality.

Most people want to have statistical data so that they can use them for policy planning, but they are much less keen to bear or share the costs, especially where there are tight financial constraints and there is great competition from other activities for funds. Thus, commitment is not just paying lip service, but actually backing up with financial and other resources support.

The need for *legal backing of statistical activities* is generally recognized and statistical laws are being strengthened.

Statistics are gradually being accepted as *public goods* for use by the entire community, and are not just instruments for government administration. However, it is felt that further advocacy effort is still needed.

Ministries' needs are generally well taken on board, though "*statistical planning*" is not necessarily "*integrated into national planning*" very formally.

United Nations' *Fundamental Principles of official Statistics* and International Monetary Fund's Special data Dissemination Standard (*SDDS*) and General data

Dissemination System (*GDDS*) are serving well as anchors for planning activities.

Countries are generally aware of the need to create a *favourable environment* for statistical development and operation. *Focussing on user-needs, effective dissemination of statistics and user-friendliness of statistical services* are taken as important issues for attention in planning. Similarly are the *promotion of statistical literacy and media relationship*. When more and more people realize the value of statistics, greater support will be forthcoming.

Countries mostly have arrangements to enable the *views* of various concerned parties to be tapped. However, it is no easy task to reconcile the diverse interests. Considerable skill is required by the main leaders to secure *consensual views*.

International standards, recommendations and experiences are well applied, owing much to the serious efforts taken by various international agencies as well as the globalization trend..

Result-based management principles are generally adopted, whether formally or informally, as resources are tight and ways and means must be used to reduce resource demands. However, techniques which may contribute to this do not seem to be well exploited as yet. For example, some advanced sampling techniques should have been used more widely.. It is considered that more research in official statistics should be undertaken.

Countries are striving to strengthen *statistical infrastructure*. Business registers, household survey frames, GIS systems, internet communications are all being pursued actively. Countries are particularly concerned with statistical human resources development and substantial provisions are there in the plans. This is a very sensible, strategic move.

Relevance and quality of statistics are being given great attention.

The achievement of comprehensiveness and coherence of statistical data produced across the entire NSS is set as a goal. However, this goal is not easy to attain and obviously there is a long way for countries to go in this area.

Split of statistical responsibilities among ministries and between the centre and the local levels remains a major issue for debate and poses difficult problems.

Obviously, with large countries, the problems tend to be more intense.

It is hard work to draw up thorough plans, but the task does not end there. ***Making sure that the plan is actually implemented both in spirit and in practical terms*** is not easy.

Having gathered fairly considerable experience, some countries are making efforts to install mechanisms for constantly improving their planning processes. ***Knowledge management approaches*** are adopted, with insistence for good documentation as a primary step. Meanwhile they are also taking good advantage of opportunities for learning from each other through ***international cooperation efforts***.

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