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Emerging issue: agile statistical systems that are fit for the future

Agile statistical systems that are fit for the future

Note by the secretariat

Summary

In an era of rapid technological advancements, evolving societal needs, climate change and pandemics, as well as of increasing demands for real-time, granular data, national statistical offices must enhance their institutional and technical capacities and move beyond traditional methods and practices.

In the present document, the secretariat presents information on national, regional and global initiatives being implemented to support the development of agile statistical systems that are fit for the future. It also identifies opportunities for regional action to advance the agility of statistical systems.

The Committee on Statistics may wish to adopt the draft decision contained in the present document and provide further views and guidance on opportunities for regional collaboration and action to develop agile statistical systems aimed at supporting national and global efforts.

* ESCAP/CST(9)/1.

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I. Introduction

1. In an era of rapid technological advancements, evolving societal needs, climate change and pandemics, the demand for real-time, granular and high-quality data is increasing significantly, and the data landscape is continually evolving and expanding. Technological advancements, including big data analytics, machine learning and the Internet of things, may enhance capacities for data collection and analysis, allowing for more accurate and timely insights. However, they may also make it necessary to upgrade skills and infrastructure, adapt to evolving data standards and regulations and ensure data privacy. To stay ahead, statistical systems need to enhance their institutional and technical capacities while moving beyond traditional methods and practices. According to one definition, an agile organization is a network of teams within a people-centred culture that operates in rapid-learning and fast-decision cycles, which are enabled by technology, and is guided by a powerful common purpose to co-create value for all stakeholders.[1]

2. In the present document, the secretariat outlines the key elements that make up an agile organization and specifically considers how these elements relate to the role of national statistical systems in the Asia-Pacific region.

3. The Asia-Pacific region is guided by two framework documents: (a) a note by the secretariat entitled "Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community",[2] which was endorsed by the Committee on Statistics at its fifth session, held in 2016;[3] and (b) the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind,[4] endorsed by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at its seventy-fifth session, held in 2019.[5] Both documents contain an outline on how to strengthen statistical capacity to produce, disseminate and use official statistics, as well as member State commitments to support national statistical systems through political, institutional and financial means.

4. In the collective vision and framework for action, the secretariat sets out five action areas, all of which constitute important aspects of agile statistical systems. Those areas are: (a) engaging users and investing in statistics; (b) assuring quality and instilling trust in statistics; (c) integrated statistics for integrated analysis; (d) modernizing statistical business processes; and (e) having the requisite skill set.

A. Opportunities and challenges in a data-driven world

5. Rapid technological advancements have ushered in a data-driven world where data are generated in vast quantities from countless sources. Every day, billions of connected devices, social media interactions, online transactions and sensors in smart cities contribute to an ever-growing pool of data. There has been a shift from data that are collected actively by national statistical offices, such as through censuses and sample surveys, to sources of data that are not primarily collected for statistical purposes. This latter group includes

[1] Wouter Aghina and others, "The 5 trademarks of agile organizations" (New York, McKinsey & Company, 2017).

[2] E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1.

[3] E/ESCAP/CST(5)/9, decision 5/1.

[4] ESCAP/75/4/Add.1.

[5] Resolution 75/9.

data collected through digital government services (e-government) or through satellite imagery or daily interactions with digital products, including mobile phones and social media, resulting in the availability of massive amounts of real-time and granular data.

6. Such an abundance of data is creating new opportunities:

(a) **Enhanced decision-making.** Data-driven insights enable more informed, accurate and timely decisions across various sectors, improving outcomes in areas including business, health care and public policy;

(b) **Improved efficiency.** A wide variety of data sources now exists, creating new opportunities for improved efficiency as data can be brought together from different sources that have been collected for different purposes and can be reused for multiple purposes. Integrating data can help to bridge data gaps, reduce the costs of data collection and reduce the response burden;

(c) **Improved public services.** Data-driven approaches allow Governments and organizations to better understand and address the needs of citizens, leading to more effective and targeted public services and policies.

7. Alongside the opportunities of a data-driven world, there are also challenges:

(a) **Data privacy and security.** As more data are collected and analysed, ensuring the privacy and security of sensitive information becomes increasingly difficult. Measures must be taken to reduce the risk of data breaches and data misuse while also taking steps to promote transparency, fairness and equitable access to data;

(b) **Ensuring data quality.** The effectiveness of data-driven decisions relies heavily on the accuracy, consistency and completeness of data. Integrating data from diverse sources and ensuring data quality across multiple sources can be challenging;

(c) **Infrastructure limitations.** As the volume of data grows, systems must be scaled up to handle increased storage and processing demands. In addition, legacy systems and connectivity may need to be upgraded;

(d) **Skills gaps.** As the types and volume of data increase, it will be necessary to upgrade the skills of staff within the statistical system and those of data users, both within and outside of government entities.

B. Impact on national statistical systems

8. In order to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by a data-driven world and better respond to the growing data needs of government and society, national statistical systems are encouraged to become more agile, in line with the above-mentioned definition of an agile organization.

II. Global and regional trends and initiatives

9. There are various definitions of agile organizations,[6] but most have the following common aspects.

A. Flexible strategy

10. A flexible strategy enables an organization to adapt quickly to changing circumstances, emerging opportunities and new challenges. Key aspects of a flexible strategy include continuous reassessment of the strategy, decentralized decision-making, the use of cross-functional teams and a strong emphasis on learning and innovation. This approach is usually accompanied by a shared vision and purpose, which is clearly communicated and understood by staff across the organization.

11. A flexible strategy can promote agility and enhance the organization's ability to respond effectively to evolving user needs. The implementation of a flexible strategy involves a strong commitment from those in leadership roles, who are key to fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation.

12. A number of Governments across Asia and the Pacific are setting high-level visions for the role of data. Those visions, which go beyond the scope of the national statistical office, are often part of a broader push towards digital government, such as the One Data Initiative in Indonesia, which was launched through a presidential regulation in 2019.[7]

13. A few countries are starting to develop national data strategies that extend beyond the scope of the national statistical office. The strategies set a clear vision and direction, which helps to create a shared sense of purpose, reflecting the key components of an agile statistical system.

14. In the context of official statistics, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century introduced the concept of the modern national strategy for the development of statistics as a planning approach to develop the capacity to produce, disseminate and mainstream the use of statistics by national statistical offices, which is in line with a country's national development plan and international and regional data requirements. Guided by the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and accountability, the national strategy for the development of statistics is a framework, a process and a product built through the collective and coordinated work of the national statistical system. It should be a government-owned strategy that is used for the benefit of the country. The most recent guidance on the national strategy for the development of statistics addresses the additional challenges of the data revolution and data ecosystems, such as open data reforms; concrete legal instruments; innovation; capacity development; and the investment necessary

[6] For more information, see Wouter Aghina and others, "The 5 trademarks of agile organizations"; Agile Alliance, "Characteristics of agile organizations", available at www.agilealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Characteristics-of-Agile-Organizations.pdf (accessed on 20 September 2024); Cat Symonds, "What are the characteristics of an agile organization?", 2 January 2024; and Sohrab Salimi, "Servant leadership: how does leadership work in an agile context?", Agile Academy, available at www.agile-academy.com/en/scrum-master/servant-leadership-how-does-leadership-work-in-an-agile-context/ (accessed on 20 September 2024).

[7] Indonesia, Cabinet Secretariat, "President Jokowi issues regulation on Satu Data Indonesia", 27 June 2019.

to facilitate new data, data access, data protection, data quality and data integration, as well as the new methods and skills needed.[8]

15. In national strategies for the development of statistics, an emphasis is often placed on long-term planning and broad consultations. While that is valuable, it may fail to address the immediate and dynamic demands for data, especially in times of crisis or rapid technological change. To ensure that a strategy remains flexible and responsive to the dynamic data landscape and evolving data needs, the framework, process and product all need to be considered. Key elements to make a strategy more agile include, but are not limited to, the following:

(a) **Inclusive process.** The process is as important as the strategy itself. The strategy should be adaptive to user needs, with mechanisms established for the continuous engagement of stakeholders, including government agencies, academia, the private sector, civil society and the public. This engagement ensures that the strategy is informed by diverse perspectives and data requirements. Regular consultations and feedback loops ensure that the strategy and its implementation can be amended;

(b) **Strong vision and shared purpose.** The product should result in a strong vision that guides all activities within the national statistical system and that vision should be shared and understood by all stakeholders involved. The strategy should provide the overall vision without necessarily providing all the details on specific activities;

(c) **National ownership.** The process and any product need to be fully country-owned and should be linked, where appropriate, to country processes. All entities with a stake in implementing the strategy must have ownership, and it is important to ensure that responsibilities are discussed and clarified during the development of the strategy;

(d) **Continuous reassessment.** Regular reviews should be undertaken to evaluate the strategy against emerging needs and technological advancements and to adjust it as required;

(e) **Agile structure.** Entities comprising the national statistical system could consider how best to organize their staff to ensure that they can respond to the changing demands placed on them. Teams within the system could be established and empowered to allow for faster decision-making and responsiveness with regard to local and sectoral data needs.

B. Empowering leadership

16. Agile organizations are usually supported by empowering leadership, which is focused on the well-being and growth of teams and the creation of a supportive and collaborative work environment that values individuals. The term “servant leadership”[9] has also been used to describe this leadership style, which is a management philosophy centred on leading by serving others.

17. In agile organizations, leadership has shifted from a traditional command-and-control model to a facilitator and enabler role, with a focus on building trust, fostering collaboration and ensuring alignment with the

[8] See https://v3.nsdsguidelines.paris21.org/en.

[9] Sohrab Salimi, “Servant leadership: how does leadership work in an agile context?”.

overarching mission.[10] This shift promotes an inclusive culture where everyone is encouraged to share ideas and solutions.

18. In such organizations, the decision-making structures enable fast and decentralized decisions. Teams are empowered to act quickly and effectively, adapting to new challenges and opportunities. However, it is crucial that they balance this empowerment with cohesive strategic direction. Leaders should ensure that while teams have the autonomy to innovate and respond rapidly, their actions should also be aligned with the organization's long-term goals and strategic vision.

19. By adopting an empowering leadership approach, the heads of national statistical offices and other entities of national statistical systems can more effectively engage and empower their employees and stakeholders, including policymakers, researchers and the public. Such a strategy not only enhances the workplace environment but also strengthens trust, improves the quality of data and statistics and ensures that statistical products and services meet society's critical needs.

C. Cross-functional teams

20. Traditional hierarchies can hinder the ability to respond swiftly to the evolving demands of an expanding data ecosystem and the growing need for real-time, granular data by policymakers. Cross-functional teams, such as sprint groups, can enhance agility, inclusiveness and resilience within national statistical systems. Such teams can be more dynamic as they are quicker to set up and can be easily disbanded when their work is completed.

21. Cross-functional teams can help to create a culture of collaboration and innovation by bringing together staff with different skills and experiences. With the growth in multi-domain areas of statistics, these teams can better suit the changing data landscape. A key characteristic of cross-functional teams is open communication and knowledge-sharing.

22. Working in cross-functional teams rather than a traditional hierarchy can reduce the bureaucratic layers, thereby enabling faster decision-making and more direct communication, both of which are critical in responding swiftly to emerging data and statistical needs and opportunities.

23. In such environments, staff at all levels are encouraged and empowered to take the initiative and contribute their expertise, which makes it possible to fully utilize the skills and expertise of staff regardless of level or grade. This democratization of roles not only enhances efficiency but also ensures that diverse perspectives are incorporated into statistical processes, leading to more holistic and integrated approaches.

24. The secretariat has been operating a form of cross-functional teams, that is, sprint groups, since the eighth session of the Committee on Statistics, held in August 2022. Sprint groups were set up on a small number of topics, including on measuring progress beyond gross domestic product and on redesigning the regional progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals. The groups have included staff from the Statistics Division and other divisions of the secretariat and have been focused on a defined activity. These sprint groups have made it possible for the teams to work intensively for short, defined periods in bursts known as sprints to achieve specific objectives. The learning from these sprint groups has been used to develop the new flexible,

[10] General Stanley McChrystal and others, *Team of Teams* (New York, Portfolio/Penguin, 2015).

time-bound and task-focused teams proposed in the note by the secretariat on progress made in implementing the decisions taken by the Committee on Statistics at its eighth session.[11] By utilizing sprint groups, national statistical offices and other entities of national statistical systems, as well as regional and global statistical organizations, can quickly develop, test and implement new methodologies and technologies, ensuring that they remain responsive to the dynamic needs of stakeholders. This approach not only enhances efficiency but also encourages a culture of continuous improvement and learning, ensuring they can keep pace with rapid advancements and respond effectively to emerging challenges and opportunities.

D. User focus

25. Another aspect of agile organizations is their focus on users, which is an area that statistical systems can enhance to increase agility.

26. This focus on users is a central element of the initiative on the power of data,[12] launched in September 2023 as one of 12 high-impact initiatives designed to bring Sustainable Development Goal solutions to scale.[13] At its core, the initiative has an emphasis on user engagement, with national data partnerships that bring together political and technical leaders to establish unified priorities and coordinate with development partners. The initiative is aimed at broadening the data and statistics dialogue through wider national partnerships and deepening knowledge by bringing together experts from various fields, providing new insights and fostering rapid progress in data and statistics.

27. Official statistics are produced for use by a wide range of users, including Governments, international and regional organizations, businesses, the media, academia, non-governmental organizations and the public. A user-focused statistical system is demand-driven, meaning it must study, map and monitor the needs and demands of different users to ensure that the data serve to support decision-making at all levels, benefit everyone, improve lives and address society's biggest challenges. Such a system could involve offering user-friendly dashboards, interactive maps, sector-specific reports, and training or resources to help users understand the data.

28. Some countries have statistical advisory councils made up of users from various institutions and groups, such as ministries and other government entities; academic and research institutions; and civil society. These advisory councils help to ensure that statistical systems are user-focused.

29. A user-focused statistical system has a user-focused approach embedded across the whole data value chain. It also has a mechanism in place to actively seek and respond to feedback, ensuring that the needs of all groups are considered. This inclusive approach involves engaging stakeholders in the development and implementation of the strategy.

30. Another way that statistical systems are strengthening their focus on users is through the Inclusive Data Charter. This initiative is aimed at mobilizing political commitments, enhancing collaboration with partners and promoting knowledge-sharing to advance the availability and use of inclusive data. The initiative makes it possible for statistical systems to better

[11] ESCAP/CST(9)/4.

[12] See https://sdgs.un.org/SDGSummitActions/HII.

[13] See www.un.org/en/sdg-summit-2023/page/transformative-action.

understand, address and monitor the needs of marginalized people and to ensure no one is left behind.[14]

E. Culture of continuous learning and innovation

31. Creating a culture of continuous learning and innovation is another key aspect of agile organizations that helps them to meet current and future challenges. It involves all aspects of an organization, from the leadership level, which must serve as a role model in this regard, through to the operational level, including aspects such as the use of cross-functional teams. Appropriate reward structures should also be in place to incentivize innovation and ongoing learning.

32. Continuous learning extends beyond the formal training programmes and involves creating a learning culture by promoting informal learning opportunities such as mentorships, peer learning, job rotation, communities of practice and the sharing of knowledge and experience. This approach to learning empowers employees to continuously develop their knowledge and skills and adapt to evolving challenges.

33. In the current context of the evolving data ecosystem in which official statisticians operate, learning must include soft skills, such as negotiation and communications skills, alongside technical skills. New research from one of the world's leading companies[15] finds that, despite new technologies transforming the world of work, the top five most in-demand skills today are human skills. The analysis shows that while technical capabilities remain vitally important for many roles, the five dominant human skills were communication, customer service, leadership, attention to detail and collaboration. Looking ahead to 2026, the company's artificial intelligence-based modelling suggests that the top five power skills that will be most in demand to meet economic needs are also human skills, namely collaboration, customer focus, personal learning and mastery, achievement focus and cultural and social intelligence. National statistical offices and other entities of national statistical systems will need to include these human skills alongside their technical skills.

34. Agile organizations commonly employ agile software development practices, leveraging open-source tools, such as R software and Python, along with cloud computing and, more recently, artificial intelligence. These emerging tools and methodologies require a shift in training approaches, emphasizing flexibility, hands-on learning, and trial and error over traditional formal courses. As a result, training programmes must evolve to meet these new demands.

35. The Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training, which operates under the Statistical Commission, is a network of international and regional training institutions that work together to build sustainable capacities in countries through the efficient, effective and harmonized delivery of training at the global and regional levels. As a result of the work of the Global Network, it will be possible to produce and use quality data and statistics, including for the monitoring and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Recently, the Global Network decided to redefine the scope of one of its task

[14] See www.data4sdgs.org/initiatives/inclusive-data-charter.

[15] Pearson, "Pearson skills outlook: power skills". Available at https://plc.pearson.com/insights/pearson-skills-outlook-powerskills (accessed on 20 September 2024).

teams to focus on fostering a learning culture within national statistical offices and other entities of national statistical systems. This task team may explore the ways to integrate learning into an organizational culture; promote informal learning, such as mentorship, peer learning and communities of practice; combine self-paced learning with other formats; identify incentives and address barriers to sharing knowledge and best practices; develop a training-the-trainers curriculum; and organize experiential learning sessions.

36. The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific of the Commission, established in 1970, offers practical training on official statistics through face-to-face, e-learning and blended programmes. Innovative approaches continue to be used in training courses, including using social learning and peer or group learning, as well as taking advantage of modern pedagogical methods and up-to-date learning management systems, all of which support a broader move towards continuous learning.

37. Mentoring and on-the-job training provide hands-on experience and personalized guidance, allowing national statistical systems employees to develop job-specific skills and knowledge. An example of this approach is the civil registration and vital statistics applied research training initiative,[16] which is aimed at strengthening the research capacity of practitioners by supporting their applied research through a blend of self-paced e-learning and in-person workshops. This training is complemented by relevant guidance and mentorship from subject experts, assisting participants in their research projects and the subsequent publication of their findings.

38. A community of practice is another effective approach to fostering continuous peer-to-peer learning. It brings together individuals who share a common interest or profession and creates a platform for them to learn from each other and share knowledge, experiences and best practices. A community of practice may also create an environment where members can collaborate and collectively develop new solutions. At the regional level, examples include the Asia-Pacific Data Integration Community of Practice and other communities established by the secretariat.[17] These communities and their effectiveness are considered in the note by the secretariat on progress made in implementing the decisions taken by the Committee on Statistics at its eighth session, which includes recommendations for streamlining, consolidating and improving the groups and communities supporting the Committee to ensure they are fit for purpose.

F. Inclusive human resource policies and practices

39. An agile organization is underpinned by inclusive human resource practices and policies that prioritize diversity, equity and belonging in the workplace. This involves creating an environment where all employees, regardless of their background, identity or characteristics, are respected and included. Inclusive human resource policies encompass all aspects of human resources, from recruitment to training and development.

40. National statistical offices face challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled professionals, especially with competition from higher-paying private sector roles. Limited career advancement opportunities may further exacerbate staff turnover. Continuous training is crucial to keep up with evolving statistical methods and technologies, such as data science. A wide range of

[16] See https://getinthepicture.org/2024-crvs-applied-research-training-initiative.

[17] See www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics/communities.

specialist skills is required, so preserving institutional knowledge is important, especially for offices with high staff turnover.

41. These challenges may result in gaps in expertise and efficiency within national statistical offices and other entities of national statistical systems but can be partially mitigated by adopting inclusive human resource policies and practices. These efforts may include employee engagement initiatives that promote fairness, equity and opportunity for all. One example is to foster a culture of respect, empathy and understanding, where differences are celebrated and leveraged as strengths.

42. Inclusive human resource policies are aimed at creating a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the broader community and drives organizational success: for example, policies that support flexible working, remote working and hybrid work. Recruitment practices may need to be adapted to ensure staff can be recruited with specialist statistical skills. If this is not possible, then tailored training programmes could also be used to fill the skills gaps. In order to attract skilled staff, compensation packages may need to be revised to be in line with the market. These could include monetary and non-monetary incentives.

43. With a growing focus on mental health and work-life balance, organizations are implementing initiatives to support employee well-being, such as wellness programmes, flexible schedules and mental health resources. Promoting a positive working environment can help both to attract and retain skilled staff.

G. Business process improvement

44. Many definitions of agile organizations also include aspects of the use of technology and data, recognizing the role these play in supporting business process improvement, including enabling information-sharing and supporting collaboration.

45. Modern statistical production systems require the identification and standardization of the processes, information and architectures that are involved in producing statistics so that those processes can be automated and data can be seamlessly passed between different systems, including using software components that may have been developed by another organization for the same purpose.

46. Several international frameworks and standards have been developed to improve and standardize the process and methodologies that statistical systems use, including the Generic Activity Model for Statistical Organizations, the Generic Statistical Business Process Model, the Generic Statistical Information Model and the Common Statistical Production Architecture, which collectively are called ModernStats models. The Generic Statistical Information Model and Generic Statistical Business Process Model are complementary models for the production and management of statistical information. The Generic Statistical Information Model helps to describe the Generic Statistical Business Process Model subprocesses by defining the information objects that: (a) flow between them, (b) are created within them and (c) are used by them to produce official statistics. These models promote the standardization of statistical production, enhancing both efficiency and consistency, ultimately improving the quality of official statistics.

47. The United Nations Global Working Group on Big Data was created in 2014. In 2021, it was renamed the Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics in order to reflect the work of the group, which includes collaboration on tools, methods and practices, as well as on the use of big data. The Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics delivers most of its work through task teams, which develop methods, prepare handbooks, conduct capacity-building activities, acquire data and make algorithms available. Many of these efforts are facilitated by the United Nations Global Platform, created in 2017, which offers a collaborative space for the global statistical community to share knowledge, data and methods. This cloud-based ecosystem supports international cooperation in the development of official statistics.

48. To assist national statistical offices in building skills in big data and data science, four related regional hubs were established in 2020 and 2021, in Brazil, China, Rwanda and the United Arab Emirates. These hubs bring the community of official statisticians together at the regional level, where countries can jointly work on big data and data science projects. In 2023, the regional hub in China was transformed into a global hub focusing on remote sensing for agriculture statistics and the measurement and analysis of e-commerce.

49. In November 2023, a new regional hub on big data and data science for official statistics was launched in Indonesia, aimed at assisting countries in Asia and the Pacific to use emerging data sources and to apply data science tools and techniques to generate insightful statistics. At its fifty-fourth session, the Statistical Commission endorsed the creation of this new regional hub.

50. National statistical offices are increasingly using new tools, many of which are open-source, including software such as R software and Python; cloud computing; and platforms such as ".Stat Suite", the Open SDG platform, "PxWeb" and the National SDG Tracker. Together, such tools can facilitate the automation of business processes and aid a transition away from using proprietary software. Automating business processes helps to streamline workflows by eliminating manual steps, reducing the risk of errors and incorporating automated quality assurance, which significantly enhances the efficiency of statistical production.

51. National statistical offices are leveraging machine learning and other data science techniques to modernize business processes, such as imputing missing data and classifying and coding information, and to analyse satellite imagery to monitor agriculture, urban growth and environmental changes. Machine learning can also help to integrate diverse data sources to produce richer data sets, often with greater scope and higher granularity and usability, and to deliver new insights. Furthermore, it can help to tailor data visualizations to individual users based on their preferences and behaviour, making data more relevant and easier to interpret.

H. Agile workplace

52. Agile organizations can be strengthened by adopting a workplace designed around flexibility. Agile workplaces come in various forms, and while opinions on what works and what does not work differ, many such workplaces feature an open-plan layout at their core in order to promote communication and teamwork. Unlike traditional offices where employees are each assigned to specific desks, some agile workplaces encourage workers to move around the office and make use of different spaces that suit their objectives at that time. This approach may foster collaboration and creativity

by removing conventional office barriers. In addition, the provision of breakout areas and collaborative and quiet spaces offer flexibility to move around and choose environments that suit different activities, which may facilitate focus and enhance productivity.

53. Agile workplaces have become increasingly common since the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, when many employees worked remotely for long periods. An agile workspace can provide a more efficient use of existing office space, recognizing that many employees continue to work remotely on a regular basis and do not need access to a permanent desk in the office.

III. National initiatives

54. Many countries across the Asia-Pacific region are adopting initiatives that support the shift towards more agile statistical systems, as illustrated in the following examples.

55. In Indonesia, the above-mentioned One Data Initiative is aimed at making government data more timely, accurate, accountable and accessible. It provides a high-level vision and broad strategy shared across government entities, setting a clear direction and creating a shared sense of purpose, which are essential components of an agile organization.

56. The Government of Australia has established the Australian Public Service Data Profession programme,[18] which is an online community for mentorship, learning and collaboration that is open to all staff. It is aimed at enhancing the data capabilities of the workforce by defining key competencies; promoting diversity and mobility within data roles; and creating clear career pathways and development opportunities. The initiative helps to attract, develop and retain the necessary data skills while fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation.

57. In Mongolia, at the first conference on gender and development, organized by the Ulaanbaatar City Council and held in December 2020, the National Statistics Office of Mongolia was awarded a certificate for being the most gender-friendly government agency in the country, in recognition of the gender-sensitive workplan, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation activities of the national statistical office.[19]

58. The Government of Fiji recently designated the last Friday in June each year as Civil Service Day to celebrate public service excellence.[20] The day is aimed at recognizing the invaluable contributions of civil servants and boosting morale and well-being throughout the civil service. By celebrating the dedication and achievements of its public servants, the Government of Fiji underscores the importance of their role in fostering effective governance and community development.

[18] See Australia, Australian Public Service Commission, “Data Profession”, 23 August 2022. Available at www.apsc.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/aps-professional-streams/aps-data-profession.

[19] United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), “Mongolia’s national statistics office receives award for most gender friendly government agency”, 9 December 2019.

[20] FijiLive, “Government designates civil service day”, 31 January 2024. Available at https://fijilive.com/government-designates-civil-service-day/.

59. In Malaysia, the country's chief statistician and his team recently completed a successful climb up Mount Kinabalu, showcasing a commitment to cultivating an agile working environment. The climb fostered a can-do spirit, resilience and teamwork – crucial traits for agile teams. By promoting physical and mental endurance, the climb was aimed at strengthening a culture of collaboration and determination, which is aligned with the agile mindset of overcoming challenges and continuously improving.[21]

60. The Government of Maldives is utilizing statistical data and metadata exchange and the ".Stat-Suite" platform to streamline the dissemination of yearbook data.[22] This approach ensures consistent data structuring and facilitates the exchange of data, allowing government agencies, researchers and international organizations to access data in a standardized format. Moreover, adopting these technologies enhances data interoperability, reduces the burden of manually processing data and supports the seamless sharing of information across various platforms, thereby promoting better data-driven decision-making and international collaboration.

61. The Government of Vanuatu has been working to integrate advanced data science methodologies in its statistical processes, which has enhanced the quality and timeliness of official statistics and allowed for more focused stakeholder engagement. They have also developed integrated dashboards using R software and application programming interfaces to enable real-time field monitoring, which have significantly improved data accuracy and timeliness, enhancing the overall efficiency and reliability of statistical processes. A redesigned production process has reduced the time taken to produce their monthly international merchandise trade statistics from 40 days to 5 days. This redesign was undertaken with mentoring support from the international data science accelerator programme of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.[23]

IV. Opportunities for regional action

62. Creating agile statistical systems offers many opportunities for the Asia-Pacific region to achieve the collective vision and framework for action of enabling and empowering national statistical systems to lead the development of and deliver innovative, trusted and timely products and services for the urgent and evolving statistical needs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Agile statistical systems will be able to adapt to the changing context and growing complexity of the world and to meet evolving user needs. They can also help to increase employee satisfaction with the use of cross-functional teams, the fostering of a culture of learning and innovation,

[21] Graig Nunis, "Chief Statistician Uzir Mahidin proves statistically, no mountain high enough, with Mt Kinabalu conquest", Twentytwo13, 6 July 2024.

[22] Mohamed Irfan, "Implementing SDMX and .Stat Suite: the Maldives experience", presentation made at the ninth SDMX Global Conference, Amwaj Islands, Bahrain, October–November 2023. Available at www.sdmx2023.org/plenary/SESSION_7/S7_MOHAMED%20IRFAN_FINAL%20-%20Implementing%20SDMX%20and%20.Stat%20Suite%20-%20the%20Maldives%20Experience.pdf.

[23] Vanuatu, Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics, "VBOS transformation". Available at https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/thematic-conferences/pacific-2024/presentations/Session%202c%20-%20Vanuatu.pdf (accessed on 20 September 2024).

and servant leadership, which are all important in creating a system that attracts and retains the right staff.

63. At the global and regional levels, there are many existing and a growing number of new opportunities for national engagement. Representation of the Asia-Pacific region in the Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training and the Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics and their related task teams could be enhanced. Member States could join the relevant task teams to benefit from the knowledge and best practices of national statistical offices in other countries.

V. Issues for consideration by the Committee

64. The Committee may wish to provide further views and guidance on opportunities for regional collaboration and action to develop agile statistical systems. It may also wish to consider adopting the following draft decision at its ninth session:

Draft decision

The Committee on Statistics decides that building agile statistical systems should be among the priorities of its work. It requests the bureau to propose, with support from the secretariat and in consultation with member States and development partners, draft recommendations to that end for consideration by the Committee, while bearing in mind the need to stay within existing regular budget resources.