



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of National Economy

Training and Capacity Building in Statistics As Depicted by
the Statistic Strategy of the Sultanate of Oman

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Training and Capacity Building as depicted by the Statistics Strategy in the Sultanate of Oman

Introduction

The vision for Oman's Economy: Oman 2020, with its main dimensions promulgated at the Vision Conference (Oman 2020) held in 1995, represent the first step in the Sultanate march to build a vision through the second long term strategy (1996-2020) representing the work strategy of the second national development strategy extending for quarter of a century.

It goes without saying to mention that Oman's economy – during a span of forty years of the wise leadership of HM Sultan Qaboos – has achieved remarkable development transformation through seven Five Year Development Plans covering the period 1996 – 2010, from a traditional economy to a global and developing economy. Oman's economy is characterised by many and diversified points of strength including sound planning, accurate project implementation, strong and comprehensive infrastructure, expanded income sources, stable social and economic policies in addition to wide open doors for the private sector and foreign investment. Joining the membership of the World Trade Organisation in 1/10/2000 was considered as an international appreciation of the capability of the Sultanate's economy to adjust to the requirement of the global economy and to be an effective part in it.

The Vision of the Sultanate focuses on human resource development of Oman and upgrading its efficiency through development of basic and higher education policies, vocational qualification and training, strengthening the role of women in the labour market, national statistic capacity building capable of dealing with modern technologies.

Perhaps the most prominent outcome of the vision concerns was the issue of the statistics law vide the Royal Decree No.29/2001 which provided for the establishment of the Statistics Advisory Committee from which came the Sultanate's Statistics Strategy 2006-2020. The period of the strategy was determined to coincide with the Long-term Development Strategy 1996-2020.

The Sultanate Statistics Strategy focused on achieving total quality assurance in data, and hence provided investment in the use of modern technologies in statistics and qualifying statistical cadre who are capable of absorbing these technologies, thus arriving at building total quality. This effort was exemplified by the fact that the Sultanate was the first country worldwide to use PDA in the 1993 census and the 1994 agricultural census.

Capacity Building of Statistics in the Sultanate: Principles and Objectives

The Statistics Advisory Committee was established by Royal Decree No.29/2001. The Committee has, in turn, formed a team to assume the role of preparing the statistics strategy for the Sultanate 2006-2020. Programmes and projects pertinent to the strategy objectives were specified. The time schedule for the strategy has been determined to coincide with the Long-term Development Strategy 1996-2020. The strategy objectives related to the development of statistics capabilities include the following:

- Achieving internationally recognised principles and standards at the international, regional and local levels.
- Computation of unbiased, consistent, accurate and of high quality representation of realities.
- Building a highly reliable Statistics database and information systems.
- Managing and developing human resources in order to qualify competent personnel capable of facing present and future challenges.
- Building a national cadre capable of dealing with modern technologies in the statistical arena.

Training methodology for Capacity Building in the Field of Statistics

Firstly:

Domestic Training: this is the training that is undertaken inside the country and is divided into three types:

1. Training inside the statistics administration.
2. Training courses /workshop in the field of statistics.
3. Training in cooperation with the international organisations working in the Sultanate.

Secondly:

Overseas Training: this is the training undertaken outside the country and is divided into three types:

1. Academic qualifications.
2. Training courses and workshops.
3. Secondment to international organisations.

Thirdly:

Membership and participation in Arab and International organisations: this includes posts and membership of the Sultanate through participation in international and Arab forums. These are:

1. The International Statistics Committee of the United Nations.
2. Arab Institute for Statistics Training and Research.
3. Membership of the Washington Group for Disability.
4. Membership of the International Committee for the Balance of Payments of the IMF.
5. Positions of Omani cadre as statistics advisors at the IMF and Technical Support staff in a number of Middle East countries.

Towards Total Quality Through the Use of Modern Technologies.

Following up the progress of statistics in the Sultanate reveals the continuous pursuit undertaken by the government for the purpose of developing all aspects of the different types of statistics together with the utilisation of the most modern technologies and methodologies in statistical data collection. This takes its manifestation in that the Sultanate was the first country in the world to use PDA in data collection during the 1993 census and the 1994 agricultural census. Other achievements include the Household Expenditure and Income Survey for the periods 1999-2002 and 2006-2010, Labour Force Survey, Industrial Survey and the Survey for Establishments. These statistical works make the Sultanate up-to-date with the development of the statistics at the world level and that is through the following endeavours:

? Capacity building in the field of statistics through censuses and surveys:

The sultanate adopts a holistic approach and the provision of generous investment funds directed to the use of modern electronic technologies in the area of statistics data collection instead of the use of the traditional paper based method usually followed in censuses and surveys. During the 2010 Census, for instance, a total of 6500 individuals have been trained in the use of electronic systems and modern technologies. Capacity building in Statistics is represented by the following:

Firstly: Censuses

Geographic Information System (GPS/GIS):

Geographic Information Systems are part of the systems used by the Sultanate, through the dependence on the different techniques and applications of these systems in the collection of statistical data. National cadre have been qualified and trained in the use of navigation and the Global Positioning System (GPS) for guiding the field staff to the region of their work, the use of the geographic location of buildings from the digital map loaded in the PDA as a starting point for opening the data collection screens in accordance with the technical controls and bases, updating geographic database related to buildings by

omission or addition , guide data collectors in the field as to the work progress in terms of the condition of the buildings visited to ensure the completion of data collection of all units and components of the building marked with distinct codes and colours.

Use of Computers and PDA:

The cadre have been trained on how to deal with the devices used in data collection, the mechanism of dealing with the systems and browsing from one screen to the other.

Self Counting (internet):

This means the use of the internet for providing Census information. This method depends on the statistical awareness of the relevant communities, which is an idea used in the Sultanate for the first time. Cadre have been trained and qualified for the provision of technical support for those who wish to use this method.

Electronic Census Site:

This is an electronic site for the census on the internet (www.omancensus.net). The cadres have been trained and qualified to supervise and control the site where a lot of information about the census is provided, especially the 2010 census, the site is available in English and Arabic languages.

Voice Portal (automatic reply system-IVR):

Cadres have been trained and qualified on the mechanism for using the Voice Portal and controlling and supervising its operation. The system provides the public, Omanis and expatriates, with the required information about the 2010 Census. Individuals can access the service through a toll free telephone number.

Call Centre and Quality Assurance:

Cadres of the centre have been trained and qualified with the objective of the provision of quality and highly accurate data. The Sultanate is considered the first country to introduce the use of call centre and quality assurance in a census for the compilation, analyzing and revision of data to guarantee the

highest level of accuracy and comprehensiveness at the least cost, through contacting families at the time of data collection at the field level. The staffs of the call centre and quality assurance were selected from individuals with different qualification (General Secondary School Certificate/Diploma, General Education, Higher Education Certificate and BSc) in addition to proficiency in several languages such as Arabic, English and Hindi to facilitate debate and discussions. They have also been given courses in statistics, communication skills and the use of the electronic devices used by the centre.

Secondly: Surveys

Household Surveys

- Training on the use of Tablet Personal Computer technology and PDA devices in data collection.
- Training in dealing with the operational processes of transferring data from PDA's to office computers by utilizing wireless communication made especially for this purpose.
- Electronic mechanism in the revision and analyzing of data and the transfer of such data from the field to the supervisory offices and then to the central database at the survey administration.

Economic Surveys:

Technologies used in the collection of prices statistics, for instance, include the following:

- A device which sends and receive data from the operation room in the Ministry's building.
- A data exchange system through sending data from and to a computer which send these data packages by wireless devices.
- PDA's distributed to field researchers and used in receiving data sets and send them once again after completing them with data.
- A well develop statistics system which performs computation processes, comparison of prices and producing the different reports.

Capacity Building through International Organisations.

The Sultanate is hosting offices of the international organisations represented by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in addition to its participation in international group such as National Accounts Expert Group, the United Nations Group for Environmental Accounts and the United Nation Group for International Classification of Economic Activities. A number of government officials from different ministries are seconded to those groups, who work as contact persons for the purpose of following up the joint work programs with these organisations and their implementation. These organisations also assign some tasks to the officials seconded to them which assist in qualifying the national cadres and help them to acquire work experience with these organisations such as:

- Obtain firsthand knowledge of the activities and programs prepared by the international organisations.
- Participation in the preparation of international reports pertinent to the Sultanate.
- Developing the skills of seconded officials in areas of planning and formulation of programs and activities through their contribution in the preparation of joint work programs between the government and the international organisations and through the preparation of concepts of the different activities embodied in the annual plan
- Strengthening the capabilities in the areas of preparation of studies and carrying out research based on the experiences of different countries
- Upgrading presentation skills through the continuous participation in meetings and seminars.
- Avail the seconded officials the opportunity to practice written and spoken English language, being the working language in the international organisations
- Building a wide database of experts through employing them in the implementation of the different programs.

Some Results of Capacity Building in Statistics of the Sultanate of Oman

Preparation of statistician in government units

The Statistics Advisory Committee undertakes an enumeration for those who perform statistical work in government units every six months, for the purpose of determining their training needs in statistics. A recent enumeration was undertaken in 37 government units during 2004 and 2010. The following table is a comparison of statisticians working in government units in the two years under reference:

Item	2004		2010		Total
	Omani	Expatriate	Omani	Expatriate	
Below university qualification					
University degree and above Percentage of holders of university degree and above					

Conclusion

The data measuring and quality assurance criteria has become a critical requirement at both, local and international levels. The Sultanate in turn is very keen in following total quality standards and the allocation of unlimited investment resources to the use of modern technologies and the qualification of statistical cadres who are able to understand these technologies in recognition of being the basis for any planning endeavour or development programs. The Sultanate has achieved remarkable steps in this area, despite the infancy of its experience.

The most prominent example, as mentioned before, is that the Sultanate was a pioneer in using PDA for the first time at the world level during the 2003 Population Census and the 1994 Agricultural Census.