

# COORDINATION OF STATISTICAL CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMS AT THE SUB-REGIONAL LEVEL<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

This paper has been prepared as the final report of the Coordinating Committee for Statistical Activities (CCSA) Task Team on the coordination of technical cooperation programs in statistics at the sub-regional level. The Task Team was set up by the CCSA in 2006 to help strengthen the coordination of technical cooperation programs in statistics that operate at the regional and sub-regional level, rather than with individual countries. The terms of reference of the Task Team agreed with the Committee were:

- To complete an inventory of technical cooperation programs in statistics being implemented by CCSA members on a sub-regional basis and to recommend a process to update the inventory as projects are completed and new projects started;
- To prepare recommendations and guidelines on good practice in the design and management of sub-regional technical cooperation programs in statistics and to disseminate these to CCSA members
- To collate and disseminate, as far as is feasible, relevant material on the design and implementation of sub-regional technical cooperation programs on statistics

The Task Team has been led by the World Bank, and the work has been carried out in coordination with PARIS21 and especially the work of Task Team 1 on reporting mechanisms. No formal meetings of the task team have been held, but opportunities have been taken to consult other agencies and interested individuals on the margins of various international meetings; other consultations have taken place virtually.

## 2. Regional Integration and Regional Economic Communities

### 2.1 Types of regional communities

Regional integration is a process that states enter into to increase regional coordination, manage common resources, to address security and other concerns and to promote economic and social development. The process of regional integration is long-standing and has been part of mainstream development thinking for fifty years or more. Since the sixties there have been numerous initiatives to promote different regional groupings with the result that few developing countries nowadays remain outside any scheme. Indeed, De Lombaerde et al (2007), state that Mongolia is the only developing country without a regional trade agreement of any kind. The World Bank (2008) identifies at least 13 different regional groupings in Africa and this list does not include arrangements such as Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (PALOP - African countries with Portuguese as an official language).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been prepared by the World Bank at the request of the Coordinating Committee for Statistical Activities. The paper does not necessarily represent the official position of the World Bank or any other member of the CCSA.

Typically, regional groupings will be established through formal treaty arrangements between the member states, which may place certain obligations on member states as well as ensuring specific rights. These treaties may have the force of law in the participating countries or they may simply encourage and support closer integration. Understanding these processes is important in that the precise arrangements governing the operations and activities of a regional group will have a major impact on any aid project or program aimed at building statistical capacity.

## **2.2 Roles and functions**

Regional and sub-regional<sup>2</sup> groupings of countries may be formed for many different purposes. For example, Van Langehove (2005) identifies eight important functions:

- Trade integration and promotion
- Creating a supportive environment for private sector development
- Promoting investment in infrastructure in support of regional integration
- Development of strong public sector institutions
- Reducing social exclusion and inequality
- Contributing to peace and security
- Managing common environmental resources and addressing common problems
- Increasing the voice of the region in its interactions with the rest of the world.

To this list may be added cultural concerns such as protecting and supporting specific cultures and promoting a common linguistic heritage.

To carry out these functions, member states often establish some kind of secretariat or they may allocate responsibility for different activities to existing agencies in the member states. For regional groups that are concerned formally with regional integration, for example, promoting trade through a customs union, the most usual arrangement seems to be a separate secretariat, with staff recruited from member states. Activities of the secretariat will generally be financed through annual budget subventions by member states, supplemented in some cases by special contributions and by support from development partners.

## **2.3 Statistical needs and priorities**

In general, regional groupings carry out two main statistical functions. The first, which seem to be common to almost all groupings, focuses on the compilation of data about the countries in the region. This may range from bringing together existing published data from national statistical systems and just compiling tables, to managing dedicated data collection exercises designed to generate regional data as their primary function. The second function follows directly from the first and is concerned with the promotion of standards, with harmonization and with the strengthening of capacity in member states. While almost all regional groups are likely, to a greater or lesser extent, to carry out the

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<sup>2</sup> The term sub-regional is used by many international organizations to identify groupings that are sub-sets of defined regions. For example, the World Bank defines six regions in the developing world (Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean). Groupings of countries within these regions are defined by the term sub-regional. In this paper the term region is used to refer to any grouping of countries except where the context makes clear otherwise.

first function, the focus on capacity building will be greater where some or all member states are at lower levels of statistical development. For development agencies involved in providing support to statistics at the regional level, capacity building is likely to be a major concern, both for the central secretariat as well as for individual member states.

In terms of statistical activities, the work of regional agencies usually focuses more on the upstream activities related to the compilation of data series and indicators as opposed to the generation of source data. The work programs of statistical offices in sub-regional agencies thus tend to have more in common with those of international agencies rather than national statistical organizations. They are typically concerned with the use of secondary data to generate data series and indicators, based on data extracted from national statistical publications or obtained from returns submitted by member states.

The scope of the work can also be broad depending on the mandate and policy focus of the regional grouping. Because regional integration through increased trade and the operation of customs unions is common, there is often an emphasis on trade data and on economic statistics, including national accounts and prices. In general, the greater the degree of regional integration, then the more sophisticated the statistical system needs to be and the greater the need for harmonization.

There is generally less emphasis on social statistics by regional groupings, except perhaps for population numbers and indicators of population change. In part this is because the management and delivery of social services is devolved to local levels and social programs such as health and education are typically not a regional responsibility. A number of regional groups, however, aim to support the easier movement of people between countries and hence have an interest in improving and developing regional statistics on population numbers, on migration and on associated phenomena such as remittances. Other concerns, which are changing the demand for regional statistics include the management of common environmental resources and monitoring the impact of climate change.

### **3. Statistical Capacity Building at the Sub-Regional Level**

#### **3.1 Projects and programs<sup>3</sup>**

As part of its program to strengthen collaboration among development partners, the PARIS21 Secretariat has recently developed a Partner Report on Support to Statistics (PRESS, 2008), which collects and analyzes information on support to statistical development by financial and technical partners. PRESS supports an exchange of information on statistical activities support by donors and other agencies which are planned and carried out in developing countries. This initiative, which is also reported under the CCSA Task Team 1, has been developed in support of the management for results agenda. In a broader context, it has been developed in line with the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, adopted at the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness

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<sup>3</sup> The data reported in this section has been derived from the PRESS report published by PARIS21 in November 2008.

of March 2005, which advocated strong commitments to harmonize and align aid delivery by multilateral and bilateral development institutions. While the terms of reference for Task Team 3 initially envisaged developing a separate inventory of donor support in statistics to sub-regional agencies, it is now recognized that PRESS will collect much if not all of the relevant information. It has been agreed with PARIS21, therefore, that this exercise will make use of the annual information collected by PRESS<sup>4</sup>.

PRESS lists 775 separate statistical projects and programs as at November 2008, providing support in statistics to developing countries and regions between 2006 and 2008<sup>5</sup>. Table 1 shows the allocation of these projects by region. A total of 563, or 73 per cent, are aimed at improving statistics in individual countries and 192 operate at the regional level. While there is little detailed information on individual projects provided in the PRESS report these regional projects can be divided into a number of classes as follows:

- Continent-wide or global projects and programs involving all countries, examples include the International Comparison Program (ICP). Another important example in Africa is the preparation of a Regional Reference Strategic Framework (RRSF) for statistics, that was completed in 2006 and which was supported by the African Development Bank, UNECA and the World Bank.
- Technical assistance projects covering a sub-set of countries, but not limited to a specific sub-regional grouping. Examples include the GDDS project being implemented by the IMF and the World Bank covering Anglophone African countries, and the various IMF regional technical assistance centers.
- Projects that are designed to support regional integration and provide support to the member states of a designated regional group. Of the 192 regional unallocated projects listed by PRESS, it is estimated that 57 fall into this category.

The 57 projects identified as being delivered through a regional or sub-regional agency represent just 7.4 per cent of the total number. This percentage, however, may well understate the importance of the regional approach. PRESS reports that the European Community (EC) is the largest supporter of statistical development over the three year period with active commitments of the order of US\$343 or almost 65 per cent of the total from 2006 to 2008. It also reports that roughly one-quarter of EC funding goes through sub-regional intermediaries. This implies that at least 16 per cent of all resources committed to statistics are provided through sub-regional agencies and this proportion is almost certainly larger in practice because, while the EC is the most important donor working at the sub-regional level and the only major one with a specific mandate to do so, it is by no means the only player.

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<sup>4</sup> To the extent that this paper makes use of data from PRESS, it also reflects the same limitations set out in the 2008 report. In particular, very few sub-regional organizations or statistical training institutes submitted returns and there are some other important gaps in coverage.

<sup>5</sup> This number excludes 65 unallocated projects and programs operating at the global level

Thus while there may relatively few sub-regional statistical projects, they are likely to be somewhat larger, on average, than most projects operating purely at the national level<sup>6</sup>. This implies that it is important that attention is given to the question of how best to ensure effective coordination? For the remainder of this report the main focus will be on these 57 projects.

### 3.2 Recent experience

Of the 57 projects and programs reported by PRESS as involving regional organizations, 12 were financed by the European Commission, 7 by bilateral donors, 8 by regional development banks and the remaining 30 by other agencies, including the IMF, the World Bank, ILO and ASEAN. Since PRESS does not report much detail on these projects, other than their title, the donor and the implementing agency, it is difficult to analyze them in detail<sup>7</sup>. It is possible, however to distinguish two types of regional project. In this report we use the term Type I to refer to projects that are generally designed to support regional integration and to strengthen the capacity of sub-regional organizations. Other projects that are mainly concerned with delivering support to national statistical systems using a regional approach are categorized as Type II.

Type I projects can typically support a number of objectives: the development and application of common classifications, methods and definitions for use by member states; the promotion of common or coordinated statistical data collection programs based on harmonized methods; and the collection, compilation, dissemination and analysis of statistical data for the region including comparisons between countries and with other regions. Projects may involve many of the same components that appear in national statistical capacity building projects, with some important differences. Key activities may include:

- Strengthening the coordination and management of regional statistics, including support for regional legislation;
- Building and strengthening the regional statistical infrastructure including aspects such as harmonizing definitions and classifications, and the development and management of databases;
- Investment in appropriate infrastructure especially information technology and communications to improve the transmission of statistical data between member states and the secretariat
- Support for regional data collection activities and for the compilation of regional data series and indicators;
- Supporting data dissemination;
- Human resource development and developing analytical skills.

There seem to be fewer Type I projects reported by PRESS than Type II, some examples include French technical assistance to the Southern African Development Community,

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<sup>6</sup> National projects supporting large scale data collection exercises such as household surveys and censuses will have higher costs, but regional projects generally have a greater capacity building component.

<sup>7</sup> More information, such as project objectives and the type of assistance provided is stored in the PRESS databases, housed at the PARIS21 Secretariat.

French support to AFRISTAT, as well as EC programs with CARICOM supporting Caribbean integration and with Mediterranean countries through MEDSTAT.

Type II projects, on the other hand, are generally aimed at improving the capacity of national statistical systems, but with inputs being organized and delivered at a regional level. The main justification for this approach is generally to reduce costs by capturing economies of scale, which may be particularly relevant for regions including a number of relatively small economies. Recent examples include UK support to the 2010 round of population censuses in the Caribbean and a Portuguese project providing support to the members of PALOP. Economies of scale are most likely to be captured when the countries covered by the project face similar problems and are at similar levels of statistical development. In these cases, inputs such as training and the provision of technical assistance may be more efficiently delivered on a regional basis. It should be noted, however, that regional projects may involve increased costs in some areas, especially in relation to project management and interaction between member states.

There are a number of examples of projects that involve both type I and type II objectives. For example, the Regional Integration Support Project that is financed by the European Community and which is being implemented through the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) aims to strengthen the capacity of statistical agencies in member states and in a number of regional secretariats. The concern here is to maintain an appropriate balance between the different objectives.

### **3.3 What has worked well and what has been less successful?**

As far as is known there is, as yet, no published large-scale assessment of sub-regional statistical capacity building programs. Individual projects are certainly monitored and evaluated, but relatively few of these evaluations are publically available. More generally, the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) of the World Bank (2007) carried out a review of 19 regional programs and more than 100 operations carried out by the Bank over the period from 1995 to 2005. The main conclusion was that there seem to be five key determinants of success for any regional program:

- Strong country commitment to regional cooperation
- The scope of objectives has to match both national and regional capabilities
- There needs to be clear delineation and coordination of the roles of national and regional agencies
- Acceptable governance arrangements take time to be put in place, but are crucial
- Planning to sustain the benefits once the program comes to an end must be built in from the beginning.

In looking at some specific regional statistical projects, it is instructive to see how these criteria have been applied. For example, a recent evaluation of a regional statistical training project in Southern Africa, financed by the European Commission, concluded that while the project clearly met an important need and there were good arguments for a regional approach, nevertheless the original project design was too ambitious and was not well matched to the capacity of the implementing agency. Delays in procuring technical assistance meant that many of the activities were only completed towards the end of the

project. While these were well designed and executed, without further action it may well be difficult to sustain both the activities and the benefits.

### **3.4 Working with different regional organizations**

There is considerable variation in the kinds of regional organizations that are involved in the implementation of different capacity building programs. The agencies identified by PRESS range from well-established regional organizations, set up by international treaty and with a permanent secretariat such as ASEAN, SADC, the South Pacific Commission and CARICOM, to specialist regional statistical organizations such as AFRISTAT in Africa and a number of regional statistical training centers. An important requirement for donors looking to establish a partnership and to work at the regional level is to analyze the type of regional organization and to have a clear view of both its mandate and its capacity.

## **4. Coordination Mechanisms**

### **4.1 Regional strategies for the development of statistics**

As with any successful statistical development project it is essential there is strong ownership and effective coordination. At the regional level this requires not only a commitment by regional institutions, but also close involvement by individual countries. At the national level, there is now widespread agreement about the importance of national strategies for the development of statistics (NSDS) as the core requirement for effective and sustained capacity building and to provide a mechanism for coordinating donor assistance. Indeed, the preparation of these strategies is a core objective of the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (MAPS) that both donors and developing countries have signed up to.

As yet, however, relatively little attention has been given to the preparation of regional strategies for the development of statistics to provide the basis for effective donor assistance. Although there have been earlier projects to prepare regional strategies, including the RRSF in Africa, it is only recently that the World Bank's Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building (TFSCB) has received any requests to support the preparation of a Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics (RSDS) at the sub-regional level<sup>8</sup>. As yet there is little guidance material on what such a strategy might include or how it could best be prepared, although it is expected that the forthcoming Guide to Statistics in EC Development Cooperation, that is due to be published by the European Commission in November 2009, will include important guidance on the design and management of regional projects.

The preparation of an RSDS, therefore, based on both those NSDSs that are in place as well as general regional development strategies and a detailed assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the regional statistical system, should be the basis for coordinating donor assistance and for ensuring that development assistance is well targeted. As far as

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<sup>8</sup> Recent projects include the preparation of a strategy for African statistical schools and for CARICOM.

possible it is suggested regional and sub-regional organizations with a mandate for statistical activity should be supported and encouraged to prepare an RSDS.

## **4.2 Communications and reporting**

Effective communications between regional agencies, participating countries and the donor are crucial to the success of any regional project. Mechanisms for regular consultation and for communication are likely to be in place where there is already a strong country commitment to regional coordination, but may be more limited in other circumstances. In general, it is recommended that projects make as much use as possible of existing coordination mechanisms and communication channels, rather than setting up something from scratch. Not only is this likely to place less demands on infrastructure it should also reduce the burdens on the managers of national statistical systems.

While it is often much cheaper to rely on electronic communications, for project management, in practice face-to face meetings are almost always important especially at the beginning when project activities are being planned and work programs are just starting. It may well be important, therefore, to build into the project design both the resources and the time needed to provide for regular consultation. Regional meetings are usually expensive; both in terms of direct cost as well as the time pressure on participants, but are often essential in building commitment and in maintaining ownership.

Reporting is also another area that is often more complex and hence more expensive in regional projects. Typically several stages of reporting are involved, from national implementing agencies to the national contact point, from the national contact point to the regional agency and from the regional agency to the donor. At each stage, the speed and effectiveness of the reporting system is determined by the weakest and the slowest agency. It is important therefore, that project designs are realistic both in terms of the time required to establish good communication and reporting systems and the time needed for them to work.

## **4.3 Donor coordination**

While the number of donor projects operating at the regional level is substantially less than those focusing on individual countries, there is still some need for coordination, not only in terms of support to specific regional agencies, but also to address problems of possible duplication between regions, especially where some countries may be members of more than one grouping. There are a number of possible coordination mechanisms and which are used where will depend on local circumstances. Based on parallels with the coordination of donor programs at the national level, regional processes could include:

- Regional strategies for the development of statistics and donor support being provided through this framework
- The identification of lead donors in specific regions and sub-regions, for example, where the donor is already involved and where there is some capacity on the ground;
- The establishment of a regular region/country/donor consultation process
- The provision and updating of information on donor programs through PRESS

#### **4.4 Documenting good practice**

Improving the design and effectiveness of regional projects in statistics also requires a more sustained effort to document and share relevant material especially documents relating to the design of projects, their implementation and their evaluation. While it is often possible to obtain material from donors and from some regional organizations, this material is sometimes difficult to find and cannot be easily compared. It is suggested, therefore, that CCSA encourage its members and other donor agencies to provide material for these kinds of projects and that PARIS21 include the documents as part of its NSDS documents and knowledge base.

### **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

There is substantial evidence that the pace of regional integration is increasing. While past performance has been mixed, there is now an increased realization by many developing countries that effective and pragmatic regional cooperation can help to promote development, increase the voice of countries on the world stage and capture the economic benefits of increased trade and the management of common resources. There are clearly still many problems to overcome and all regional organizations need to address the trade-offs between national sovereignty and increased cooperation and between pursuing national and regional goals. Nevertheless, the statistical community and especially the CCSA need to recognize that cooperation with regional organizations is important and can be an effective mechanism for delivering assistance.

Improving coordination in the design and implementation of regional projects will involve a number of steps and these are proposed as follows.

- Effective regional projects require a strong country commitment to regional cooperation and statistical projects are likely to be more successful where other processes to strengthen regional commitment are in place and where regional institutions are well established (all agencies).
- Regional agencies should be encouraged and supported to prepare regional strategies for the development of statistics and documentation and good practice material to support this should be developed (PARIS21 and WB).
- The Partner Report on Support to Statistics (PRESS) should continue to document regional and sub-regional statistical projects and should be encouraged to increase the amount of detail as far as possible to allow for further analysis (PARIS21, all donors and recipient agencies).
- Documentation on project design, implementation and evaluation should be made available by donors and regional agencies and should be included by PARIS21 as part of the NSDS documents and knowledge base (PARIS21).
- Support to statistical development at the regional level should be based on and coordinated with regional strategies. Consideration should be given to strengthening coordination and to identifying lead donors in some cases (All donors).
- As far as possible donor supported projects and programs should make use of and be built on existing mechanisms and processes for coordination, consultation and reporting (all donors).

In order to take this process forward, a CCSA Task Team may not be the most effective mechanism and it has been agreed that the work of the Team will end with the publication of this final report. There are a number of existing processes whereby the recommendations can be taken forward, including through the regular work program of PARIS21 and of other agencies. An important requirement will be that sub-regional organizations and other statistical agencies with a regional mandate, including training institutes, are encouraged and supported to submit annual returns for the PRESS exercise.

**Table 1. Projects Reported by PRESS 2008**

Region <sup>9</sup>	Total Number of Projects	Total Number of Regional Unallocated Projects	Number of Projects Working with Identified Regional Agencies
Sub-Saharan Africa	375	51	24
East-Asia and the Pacific	70	9	6
South Asia	65	17	1
Europe and Central Asia	97	31	16
Latin America and the Caribbean	80	26	9
Middle East and North Africa	33	3	1
Global	55	55	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>775</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>57</b>

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<sup>9</sup> Regions are as defined and used by the World Bank

**Acronyms**

AFRISTAT	Observatoire économique et statistique d'Afrique subsaharienne (Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa)	IMF	International Monetary Fund
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	MAPS	Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics
CARICOM	Caribbean Community	NSDS	National Strategy for the Development of Statistics
CCSA	Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities	PALOP	Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (African countries with Portuguese as an official language)
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa	PARIS21	Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century
EC	European Community	PRESS	Partner Report on Support to Statistics
GDDS	General Data Dissemination System	RRSF	Regional Reference Strategic Framework
ICP	International Comparison Program	SADC	Southern African Development Community
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group	TFSCB	Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building
ILO	United Nations International Labor Organization	UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa