

Reporting Mechanisms on Statistical Capacity Building Activities - Report of Task Team 1: Partner Report on Support to Statistics (PRESS)

Prepared by the PARIS21 Secretariat

Background

1. The international development community has been consistently calling for better coordination of development efforts and better alignment with national strategies of developing countries, in order to increase the effectiveness of these efforts in achieving significant and sustained development outcomes. It is now well-established that development needs to be a collaborative effort which involves developing countries, donors and international development agencies in a true partnership. The area of statistical development is of course an integral part of this coordination and alignment effort in the broader *aid effectiveness agenda*, where such collaboration would contribute to more efficient statistical systems, as well as improve the effectiveness of external resources. The Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (MAPS) of February 2004 promoted the strengthening of statistical capacity building in the developing world, including the preparation of National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS), an initiative to render national statistical systems more responsive to policy needs and more coherent with respect to available national resources and capacity.

2. As a step in promoting effective collaboration among development partners, the PARIS21 Secretariat developed a Partner Report on Support to Statistics (PRESS), based on the work of an inter-partner Task Team¹. The PRESS, which collects and analyzes information on support to statistical development by financial and technical partners, is intended to enable an easier exchange of information on statistical activities being carried out and planned in recipient countries. This initiative is particularly important at the present time, with the setting up of a Statistics for Results Facility (SRF), which would increase support to statistics, as part of the Managing for Development Results (MfDR) agenda. Both the SRF and PRESS are consistent with the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, adopted at the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness of March 2005, which advocated strong commitments to harmonize and align aid delivery by multilateral and bilateral development institutions.

¹ The PRESS Task Team, composed of representatives from France, UK, EC, FAO, IMF, OECD, UNECE, and the World Bank, met eight times from November 2006 to October 2008, during which it defined the PRESS questionnaire (including statistical classifications), the modalities for each round, and reviewed the results and lessons learned from the first round of PRESS.

3. Results from the PRESS exercise provide a better understanding of financial and technical support to statistical development, as well as the content of that development, and thus can be useful in designing the assistance programs of development partners. In addition, for recipient countries, they could serve as a basis to improve the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the NSDS by identifying possible financing sources in particular areas. It is clear, however, that partner financial support to statistical development is a complement to recipient countries' own funding efforts to support their national or regional statistical development. PRESS will be of use to national planners to formulate action plans for statistical development activities in the international context. Thus the intended audience of PRESS encompasses both national and international stakeholders, including the international donor community, NSDS design teams, and other national policymakers and planners.

4. Thus far, two rounds of PRESS have been conducted. In the most recent round (PRESS 2009), 97 financial and technical partners received questionnaires and direct contacts (up from 83 in the 2008 Round). Although the response rate was quite positive from many of the key financial and technical partners, a few of the major UN agencies (e.g., UNDP, WHO and UNFPA) were unable to respond. Headquarters staff in these agencies indicated that — because of their highly decentralized organization schemes — they had difficulty responding to the PRESS questionnaire, which requests detailed information on statistical support at the country level.

5. The present note therefore offers some thoughts on improving the PRESS, particularly with respect to (i) data collection and processing and (ii) further analysis of results.

Data collection and processing

6. To obtain an accurate picture of trends in support to statistics, partners are requested to provide not only commitments but also actual disbursements in an annualized form. In cases in which a partner project covers several years, the PARIS21 Secretariat arrives at annual figures by merely dividing the project total through by the number of years. However, it is recognized that few projects disburse evenly from year to year. *The PRESS exercise therefore needs a stronger commitment from all partners to improve the data from previous PRESS rounds by providing both commitments and actual disbursements on a yearly basis.*

7. To address the issue of how to improve the response rate of UN agencies, UNSD is reviewing the existing management information systems of the FAO and Eurostat who have responded to PRESS but have to deal with highly decentralized systems in the organizations they are part of, as for Eurostat the European Commission. In addition, at the request of UNSD, UNDP carried out a “search” exercise on its Results Reporting Database to identify its support to statistical development at the country level. This exercise searched a number of key words (such as census, survey, statistics, statistical capacity building) on 2008 country activity reports from UNDP country offices. The results of the exercise showed that the word search approach could provide a good base of information for further discussion with country offices². The information extracted from the search exercise provides the name of the activity and an indication of statistical areas covered. The time period of the activity and the commitment amount are not, however, available and would require follow-up with country offices. Based on this experience, UNSD plans to encourage other

² Tabulated results of the UNDP exercise are presented in volume I of the PRESS report.

key UN agencies that support statistical development, namely WHO and UNFPA, to carry out a similar exercise, to the extent possible.

8. Another approach to improve partner response to PRESS would be to encourage UN agencies to respond to the OECD's Creditor Reporting System (CRS)³. An extraction of information on statistical development from the CRS for 2007 provided extensive data on UNICEF and some information for the UNDP, UNFPA, and UNCTAD. It is interesting to note that a similar exercise carried out for 2006 did not yield any information for UN agencies, possibly implying that reporting to the CRS is not done regularly or systematically.

9. One specific data sector has been overlooked by the PRESS thus far: activities related to food security (early warning) systems. These systems are supported by a number of partners, including the FAO and USA. These activities were not included in PRESS 2009, but, given their relevance for agricultural and food policy, are an important data source and should be covered in future rounds of PRESS.

10. In processing PRESS data, PARIS21 recognizes the danger of double-counting. In fact, the PARIS21 Secretariat itself is a potential source of such double-counting, as PARIS21 donors report the support they provide to the Secretariat and that support is often then channeled to recipient countries. Afristat is another example of an intermediary implementer of aid, where a bilateral donor such as France provides funds which are then disbursed in Afristat member states. The PARIS21 Task Team charged with designing the PRESS exercise — and which has since been transformed into a Quality Advisory Group — considered the double-counting issue at its October 2008 meeting. A question on the partner's project role was modified in the questionnaire to identify the partner either as a lead donor, other donor, or implementer. This information, requested in the 2009 round, will enable the PARIS21 Secretariat to more easily filter out potential double-counting. Nevertheless, the responses received are not always clear. Verification with both financial partners and intermediaries will therefore be necessary and should be strengthened in the future.

11. As noted under the section on "Limitations of the Results" in the 2009 PRESS report, partners at headquarters level are not completely knowledgeable of the support their organization provides at the country level and thus their data to PRESS are likely underestimated. To address this issue, the PARIS21 Secretariat is assisting countries to report on donor support in the framework of the NSDS funding process. The results of these efforts serve as a valuable feedback to partners at headquarters.

Further analysis of results

12. The analysis of PRESS 2009 results highlighted two areas that could benefit from more in-depth analysis to measure the level of support to statistical development and the impact of that support:

³ The CRS aid activity database contains detailed quantitative and descriptive data on individual aid projects and programmes. CRS data are used to analyze the sectoral and geographical breakdown of aid for selected years and donors, to examine aid that promotes specific policy objectives (gender equality, environmental sustainability, untying, aid for trade) and monitor donors' compliance with various international recommendations in the field of development co-operation. See <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/crs/>.

- ***financing of population census***: The share of financing received for a population census to the cost of a country's census would give a better measure of the financing required. This indicator would require data on the cost of population censuses, either by country or a per capita average, which may be available at UNSD.
- ***progress in respecting Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness principles***: PRESS figures represent a powerful tool in monitoring development partner and recipient country progress toward Paris Declaration commitments. In particular, PRESS figures could be compared with the statistical capacity indicators, as maintained by the World Bank, to determine to what extent partner support is resulting in increased capacity. It should be noted that PARIS21 already conducts a similar exercise annually — the “Tracking Progress of the PARIS21 Partnership's Outputs and Outcomes” report⁴. This report considers the centrality of NSDSs, coordination, capacity building and availability of better statistics, all based on existing indicators including PRESS data. Rather than expand the tracking report to cover Paris Declaration commitments, the PRESS report itself could analyze the data to measure progress toward the five principles: Ownership, Alignment, Harmonisation, Results, and Mutual Accountability. However, it may be preferable for the PRESS to remain merely at the input level and leave the analysis to other processes.

Other points

13. For future PRESS rounds, the following proposed points could improve the PRESS information collection process and facilitate the accessibility of PRESS results:

- Comparing a country's share of commitments (for a given period) to the cost of its NSDS action plan would provide an overall idea of the support for the implementation of the NSDS. In this regard, the PARIS21 Secretariat could try to gather and keep information on the costs of NSDS action plans, as NSDS are approved.
- An inter-active tool could be developed, allowing partners to access and analyze PRESS results for their own purposes. The design of such a tool should preferably rely on existing software at the OECD.
- Each partner organization should assign a contact point for PRESS. Having the “right” contact point in an organization would facilitate the collection of PRESS information and any necessary follow-up.

14. Finally, the frequency of the publication of the PRESS report should be revised from an annual to a biennial basis, as the information does not change significantly from one year to the next. However, it is proposed that data collection occur annually. Therefore, a full report would be published on even-numbered years and brief updates on odd-numbered years.

⁴ The first such report (2008) is available at <http://www.paris21.org/documents/3325.pdf>.