Samoa NSO Experience of ICT
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1. Management issues of using ICT for your national statistical office

(a) How is ICT changing NSOs functions and how should it react to these changes?

The National Statistics Office of Samoa is now known as the Statistical Services Department (SSD) under the Ministry of Finance. This was the result of the Public Service reforms that became effective in July 2003 and the SSD was divided into two major divisions: The Social Statistics & Census and Surveys, and, the Economics & Finance Statistics. Previously, the NSO was a separate organization and was called the Department of Statistics.

It was only in the last 6 years that the SSD of Samoa had been fully exposed to ICT. It was the first time ever that all staffs of the two major divisions had full access to personal computers, internet access, laptops, scanners and colored printers. The server was also installed for the first time in the year 2001.

In 2004, the NSO managed to secure a website for the first time at SPC (Secretariat for Pacific Community) in Noumea at New Caledonia, and, SPC is still hosting this website. The email address is www.spc.int/prism/country/ws/stats and most publications and statistics are available on this website.

Though the SSD was very slow in adopting the ICT compared to many other NSOs in the world, the ICT has done wonders in the last 6 years to the performance of the mandated roles and functions of the NSO in Samoa.

For instance, with the availability of computers, statistical software, internet and ICT technical staffs, the data from the 2001 Population and Housing Census was fully inputted in-house in 2001, edited, cleaned and analyzed for the first-time in history by the local statistical officers. All socio-economic surveys after this 2001 census followed suit. Before that, censuses and surveys were inputted by private companies, and, overseas consultants have been hired to write reports due to lack of appropriate IT and limited local capacity.

However, the SSD again managed to conduct another Population and Housing Census in November 2006 in which the data is currently in compilation indicating the continuing positive influence of ICT in statistical work.

Therefore, in the last 6 years the ICT has helped to:
♦ improve the speed, processing and performance of statistical work
♦ replace manual and paper work with computerized skills
♦ improve the quality and accuracy of statistical activities like data analysis

- ♦ speed up technical help and assistance from other countries and local expertise via internet
- ♦ speed up communication and networking among statistical officers and other ministries, and,
- ♦ improve the dissemination of statistical information both in electronic format and hard copies

(b) What is the NSOs strategy for using ICT to gain and sustain competitive advantage for producing official statistics?

© As the head of NSO, how do you use ICT to improve your office's intelligence?

The SSD does not have a formal Strategy for using ICT to gain and sustain competitive advantage for producing official statistics. However, as few available IT staffs gradually experimented and experienced the effectiveness of ICT, the arising issues such as limited computer skills, limited IT skills, limited equipments and resources, limited knowledge of the use of appropriate statistical software were resolved by on-the job trainings, sharing knowledge and taking advantage of available trainings both locally and overseas. Such opportunities helped greatly to improve the capacity of the limited staffs available and encourage the speed of the production of official statistics.

For instances, in the last two years, the SSD managed to release the Consumer Price Index reports and Arrival Statistics reports to the public on monthly basis via electronic dissemination or hard copies because the staffs had training opportunities and IT equipment became available to do the work.

The allocation of sufficient budget to meet the immediate responses to arising issues like network technical problems, and, the continuous on-the-job-trainings of computer skills in all areas also helped to ensure that sustainability of ICT is maintained and official statistics meet the stakeholders' demands in the last six years.

2. How do you manage ICT effectively and efficiently?

(a) How do you evaluate the effectiveness of NSOs ICT investments and expenses?

(b) How are your ICT resources organized and managed to respond effectively and efficiently to growing demand for official statistics?

At the moment, the SSD has 35 established staffs. Two technical staffs have been given the task to deal with any technical problems with IT equipment, connections, means of communications, the application of available software and computer programs. Support services in the maintenance & repairs have been provided by private companies. In addition, one staff works full-time on up-dating and monitoring of the website.

In terms of organizing and managing of resources, each of the two major divisions of the SSD organizes its own budget and resources that also accommodates specific needs of the ICT that is used by the division in the financial year. For instance, under the budget for the Population and Housing Census 2006, all IT equipments required, expected maintenance and support services have been budgeted accordingly under this Output. The other division had also budget for its expected ICT expenses throughout the year. In this way, each division had been able to identify how much was spent on ICT each year and whether the investment was worth doing.

To respond to growing demand for official statistics, each division carries out the collection of the required data, coding, and data analysis. Data programming and data entry are the specific duties allocated to our ICT section. When the data is cleaned and ready for analysis, the division takes over the dataset and started with analysis and report-writing within the division. The division will also be responsible for report formats, marketing and dissemination of statistics using their own staffs not the ICT.

In 2006, the SSD has been working vigorously throughout the year, to put in place a strong proposal for a Statistics ISP (Institutional Strengthening Project) this year. This was approved by the Government of Samoa last month and it will be effective in July 2007.

In this ISP, the ICT is one of the biggest areas the department has been proposing to invest a lot of physical and human resources. It is hoped that the human resources will be trained to the best of their knowledge in the applications of ICT in their work and to identify the best IT equipment that would encourage the production of statistics in the most effective and efficient manner in Samoa. It is also hoped to computerize most statistical activities to avoid delay of information to the public.

3. What is the link between government support for technology use and your NSOs ICT strategy?
   (a) What training is already available in your country for ICT personnel?

   (b) Is the available training well suited to the needs of the ICT in NSO?

The Government of Samoa has already put in place a National Strategic Plan for ICT for the years 2004-2009. In this document, it states that "the Government of Samoa aims to roll out ICT to the entire country together with capacity building to ensure that every Samoan, including women, youth and people with disability will learn how to use ICTs to their advantage. Specifically, the Government aims to integrate ICT to the delivery of existing public and private services ensuring that Samoan people have the opportunity to participate in the Information Society"[1]

In reality, the Government fully supports ICT trainings both locally and overseas for public servants and also in primary schools, secondary and tertiary education. Basic

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[1] Government of Samoa 2004-2009, page iii

trainings are available in schools while more technical trainings are available at the National University of Samoa; Private computer schools and overseas universities.

Some of the local trainings meet the needs of the NSO like maintenance and engineering work. However, the applications of specific statistical software in sampling selections, questionnaire design and data programming are too statistical-oriented that specific trainings will be required.

For instance, in the application of the CSpro for data entry and editing of the 2006 Population and Housing Census, technical assistance was sought at SPC in New Caledonia. For the application of the Sudaan for survey analysis, assistance was sought at Massey University in New Zealand in 2005. Other trainings were made available at SIAP in Tokyo, Phillipines, and the US Census Bureau in Washington. These specific trainings were well-suited to the needs of the SSD but were not available locally. The costs of utilizing these trainings were very dear unless it was offered on a fully-funded basis.

4. What are major obstacles in the use of ICT in your NSO?

- ♦   Budget constraints
- ♦   Limited local technical staffs to manage ICT
- ♦   In-sufficient time for on-the-job trainings in the office due to daily demands
- ♦   Limited training opportunities and exposure to statistical methods and ICT used in other NSOs around the world