



Sixth Management Seminar
for the Heads of National Statistics Offices in Asia and the Pacific
28 – 30 May 2007, Hong Kong, China

Country Paper

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Managing Statistical Development and Information Technology for National Statistical Offices

Country Paper: TONGA

1. Introduction:

The Statistics Department was established in 1975 with operational guidelines, duties, rules and regulations specified in the Statistics Act 1978. The major functions of the Statistics Department includes collection, compilation, analyses and dissemination of statistics; co-ordination of government departments' statistical operations to ensure compliance of statistical operations with statistical standards and procedures, and avoid duplication of effort by Government Departments; provide statistical assistance and advice to government; and generally promote an integrated statistical system for the Kingdom.

At present, each division in the department collected and compiled its own statistical outputs. Once each output is cleared by the concerned heads of division and department, a press release is prepared, then such output is saved to the main server thus available for the ICT to release through the office website; www.spc.int/prism/country/to/stats

Staff members of the department are reminded of their own responsibility with regard to ensuring the security of the ICT systems and data. There are legal requirements as specified in the Statistical Act that provide for the security and protection of official data collected by the Statistics Department.

Guide for the country paper;

To focus on structured and point-wise discussion, participants may please address the following questions in particular (you could take population censuses or any other large statistical operations as the project in your mind while addressing the issues).

2. 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?

Before July 2003, the statistical outputs of the department were released to the media, published reports/bulletins in large numbers and distributed to the users who demanded. Since the establishment of ICT section in July 2003, the number of published reports reduced, then used the department website to share our statistical outputs with the users. This reduced the cost of publication and made it more convenience and fast communication with the users. For this development, the NSO has to seek sources for the required equipment and trained its staff members to execute this development.

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

The ICT section of the department is a small one and its function is not included the production. It is noted in the above-noted introduction that each division (except IT section) produced its own statistics. Then IT or ICT stored such statistics in the main server and make these available to the users through the office website.

- (c) How do you determine ICT project priorities?

Training of ICT personnel in order to improve their knowledge and experiences. This is a Human Resource Development, which is one of the common priorities of most organisations. The availability of financial resources for the required equipments as well as training needs. In this case, there must be a balance between these two. That is, the availability of the required equipment and well trained ICT personal/s at hand to handle the said equipment.

- (d) As the head of NSO, how do you use ICT to improve your office's intelligence?

The department has to produced all statistical outputs according to the recommended international methodologies, save in the concerned computers and office server and then at the office website. These are available within the office network and then share information with the users, locally and abroad.

3. How do you manage ICT effectively and efficiently?

The Statistics Department has a written Computer User Policy which set out the principles and requirements for the use of information technology in the department.. The objectives of this user policy include; (i) the prevention of unauthorised access, disclosure, modification, manipulation or destruction of data held by the department. (ii) The assurance of privacy and confidentiality of information collected. (iii) The assurance that people who use the IT are aware of their responsibilities. (iv) The assurance that the use of IT is limited to the purpose for which the resources are intended, and the achievement of these objectives in a practical and cost effective manner.

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

The effectiveness of NSOs ICT investments and expenses can be evaluated by ICT personal, working life of equipment and output/services. The ICT personal must be well trained with very good experience in handling the ICT equipments. Less repair and maintenance of ICT equipments is a sign of effective usage with care. And also consider the output/services vs. expenses.

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

The IT Division, is in charged of proper maintenance and repair of computer equipment. It is also responsible for procurement of computer equipment and accessories and computer supplies a well as backup of all major databases on a regular basis. It often conducted regular training on good computer housekeeping as well as Microsoft Word and Excel. This Division utilised assistance from Ministry of Finance computer staff on several occasions during the past few years.

In the past 3 years, one Computer Programmer/Information Technologist, was recruited each year under the Australian Youth Ambassador for Development (AYAD) for 12 months employment in the Department. The services of the AYAD Programmer/Information Technologist contributed enormously to improve computer skills of staff as well as improve hardware for the Department.

4. What is the link between government support for technology use and your NSOs ICT strategy?

It is the Government's IT vision is that "information technology will be used to ensure that the right information is available at the right time to the right people for the least cost". The use of information technology is central to the main purpose of the department which is responsible for the collection, processing and dissemination of official statistics for the Government of Tonga.

The objective of the Government's computer usage policy is to ensure that computer systems and data located in various departments and ministries are protected from misuse and unauthorised access. The policy emphasises that "it is essential that these computer systems and the data stored and process, be operated and maintained in a secure environment and in a responsible manner".

(a) What training is already available in your country for ICT personnel?

The trainings were on IT, thus introducing the ICT. These trainings were on 2 to 4 weeks. However, for the last 3 SIAP invitations for ICT trainings, 2 of my staff members attended the first 2 ICT trainings at the SIAP. My office declined the 3rd one due to the workload and staff constraint of the department.

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

The available trainings are well adequate to our current ICT needs, but more training are needed to encounter the increasing volume of data and unforeseen staff turnover.

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

The 2 major obstacles in the use of ICT in my department are the staff turnover at IT section and financial constraint;

5.1 Staff turn-over at IT section;

There had been 2 staff members of the department with IT academic background, each in-charged (one as computer programmer) this section in different periods. They have left the department and migrated abroad. Thus, in the past 3 years, this section was in-charged by a one AYAD each year. The last one ended in April last year. Since then, this section was in-charged by a semi-professional officer with hope for a return scholar with IT background.

5.2 Financial constraint;

The annual budget of the department is inadequate to acquire the 2 major needs of the IT section. The needs are; training other staff members to recruit at IT section and the supply of the required equipments. As such, the Department published its Website on the World Wide Web in July 2003. The website was designed with assistance from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community under the PRISM project, and funded by the UK DFID. The PRISM project provided training of the Department's Webmaster, the Assistant Computer Programmer, on website design, development and publication, as well as provided a computer for the sole use of the Webmaster in website design. Therefore, the IT training of IT personal is relying on training arrangements by regional/international organisations.