

Issues Relating To Governance In The Statistical Institute Of Jamaica

Background

The year 1984 was a significant one for the statistics office as it was the year that the change was made from the Department of Statistics to the Statistical Institute of Jamaica and the designation of the Head was changed from Director to Director General. It was envisaged that the change in status would provide the new organisation with the powers and resources to enable it to effectively become the focal point for the promotion, development and integration of economic and social statistics pertaining to the island. The 1984 amendment of the Statistics Act, which gave effect to these changes, also broadened the scope of the Institute's work.

The Mission

The *Mission* of the Statistical Institute of Jamaica as stated in the Corporate Plan (2002-2005) is:

To provide relevant, timely and accurate statistical information and technical services, consistent with international standards, to national and international clients.

The broad objectives are to:

- *provide policy makers with accurate, relevant and timely data;*
- *reform and reposition the organization to better support the work and to achieve its mission; and*
- *improve the theoretical and scientific soundness of existing indices and estimates, and to introduce relevant and appropriate ones*

The Proposed Modernisation - Statement of the Problem

The increased demands of the clients, internal and external, of the Institute are the driving forces behind the need to modernize and implement new processes and systems in order to satisfy their needs. The service-oriented approach must become one of the hallmarks of all the operations within the Institute and must also become a part of the new culture.

Providing accurate and timely data is vital to all decision-making processes and is of great national importance. For the modernisation process to be successful the critical inputs of technical and financial assistance are necessary ingredients. To date the operations have been constrained by limited budgetary support, particularly that without the commensurate technological support additional staff would have to be employed to satisfy the increasing levels of output that are being demanded.

The technology needs to be assessed and new systems put in place where necessary. This technology change will be used to drive the change process. The data processing activities of the Institute need to be addressed, as a number of the processes are manual and the operations fragmented.

From the data collected and processed a lot of information is produced but not adequately stored, this particularly so with the trade data. The retrieval process can be time consuming when fulfilling requests for information that has been captured but not

published. The need to acquire a database system for Data Management and Warehousing is a prerequisite to facilitate efficient storage and retrieval of information. In line with the database system there is also the need to develop a modern geographical information system that will facilitate the mapping of critical information for the planning process and also reduce the need to produce, store and make copies of maps in paper form.

The operations of the Institute are fragmented and this has implications for cost, time and processes employed. The need to develop a networking system within the Institute, linking the various units together and one site to the other, is also a priority.

The increase in the demand for information and the request for new types of indices dictates that an assessment of the current projects and programmes be conducted. The assessment will seek to determine i) the usefulness/ relevance of the current statistical data being produced and to recommend short and long term measures for improvements in order to satisfy users' needs more adequately and ii) how to improve the processes used to collect and produce data thereby improving timeliness, accuracy and the overall quality of the data.

With the proposed changes there is the need to create a new organization structure that can support the changes and implement the staffing system needed to support operations. Some of the requirements of the new structure will be: a) jobs will be designed around processes and not tasks, b) new job descriptions for each post, c) a new approach to the internal communication system must be developed and d) existing staff may/will have to be re-trained to meet the new requirements of the jobs.

It is necessary to obtain the staff buy-in into the proposed changes. A comprehensive change management strategy with particular focus on: implementing the change, developing a communication strategy and policy and working with staff to assist them with accepting and understanding the change process, is to be developed and implemented.

External support will be required in the implementation of these processes, as it will be difficult for the management and staff to focus on change and simultaneously keep abreast of the workload.

Strategic Directions

The three-year Modernisation Plan has been written and in order to effect the necessary changes, the following Strategic Objectives have been identified:

1. To improve the technical operations through:
 - Improved data gathering/extraction mechanisms
 - The use of technology for data management and warehousing
 - Improved internal and external communication systems, including public education
 - Better monitoring of the field service structures and operations

- Establishing data dissemination standards
2. To create a functional structure, appropriate systems and procedures that facilitate quick decision-making, fast turn around on assignments, high levels of accountability and a viable operation.
 3. To recruit, develop and retain staff with the right attitude and requisite technical competence and experience.
 4. To create a client service culture that affords as much satisfaction to those rendering the services (internal clients) as it does to those being served (external clients).
 5. Review of the legislative environment and make recommendations for change that provide some level of security to the providers and users and the penalties for non-compliance.
 6. To secure suitable office accommodation facilities, either through leasing, purchasing or building, that will house the operations of the two Corporate Area offices in one location

Major Issues in the Implementation of the Modernization Plan

There are a number of issues relating to the effective implementation of same:

1. The Positioning of the Institute

While credence is given to the work of the Institute, it is not very clear that it enjoys a high level of recognition or acceptance within the structure of government. Efforts are to be made to correct this position as it has implications for staff morale and financing

2. Adequate Funding

The operations of The Institute are financed from the Consolidated Fund and government revenues are on the decline. Accordingly, adequate funding has not been provided for development work in recent years.

3. The relationship between the data providers and ourselves

There is a general malaise and a miss-trust of issues relating to the government within the society and this situation is having a negative impact on data collections. The public education programme will have to address issues such as the benefits to be derived from the compilation of data that are provided.

The relationships with the other public sector providers also need to be addressed, as there are concerns about the way in which the information is collected and provided.