

**Innovation in official statistics:
Bangladesh Experience**

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Introduction:

Official Statistics of Bangladesh are Statistics produced by government agencies to meet the statistical information required for policy-makers in formulating economic and social policies and programmes in addressing the socio-economic development and welfare of the nation as well as the international agencies. Official statistics is the key source of information for planning and policy making in almost all the countries of the world. The main sources of official statistics are the national censuses and representative sample surveys. Some administrative data sources are also used to generate official statistics. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the national statistical office, is entrusted with the key responsibility of generating official statistics of Bangladesh. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) provides official statistics under the policy guidance of the Ministry of Planning through Planning Division and participate various inter-ministerial and inter-agency committees.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics collects compiles and disseminates various statistics on regular basis such as agricultural production, industrial production, price index, demographic indicators, foreign trade, labour force statistics etc. BBS is also responsible for conducting three national censuses namely Population and Housing, Agriculture and Nonagricultural economic activities. It also conducts a series of sample surveys in the areas of Household Income and Expenditure, Agriculture, Demography and Health, Labour Force, Child and Mother Nutrition, Vital Statistics, Situation of Children and Women, Enterprise and Institutions, Manufacturing and Cottage Industries, Distributive Trade, Hotel and Restaurant and many others.

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) also produces and disseminates the estimate of country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by industrial origin at current and constant prices on an annual basis. Along with GDP by production method, BBS also estimate expenditure

based GDP. In addition, BBS compiles and disseminates data on Gross National Income (GNI), Savings and Investment. All these information are used by the planners, policy makers, researchers, academicians, development partners, NGOs for preparing appropriate policy measures in the relevant areas.

Like most of the national statistical offices (NSOs) in developing countries, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has been experiencing some drawbacks that should be addressed for enhancing sustainable institutional capacity and service quality of the BBS. One common drawback of the BBS is the use of traditional methods in data collection, supervision and data dissemination which takes a lot of time to edit, capture and disseminate data of national censuses and surveys. Due to time lag in data collection and data dissemination the usefulness and importance of data become redundant and national programmes and policies suffers from lack of timely data. In the recent years BBS is endeavouring to improve its position with respect to statistical methods using innovative technique in data collection and management and also in data dissemination. For streamlining these issues, the governance issues are also crucial because without proper administrative measures the improvement and innovation in the area of data collection and dissemination is not possible.

In the present paper the innovative techniques adopted in the context of Bangladesh in the recent years in respect of governance, data collection and management and dissemination has been highlighted.

2. Constraints in BBS in respect of Governance, Data collection and Dissemination

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has been experiencing following constraints that should be addressed for enhancing sustainable institutional capacity and service quality of the BBS. The problem may be categorized as follows:

1. **Lack of statistical legislation:** There is no general statistical law which governs the activities of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. The statistical activities of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics are currently supported by two out-dated pieces of legislation, namely; (i) the Census Order,1972, adopted from census acts of earlier years, which authorizes the Director General of BBS to plan, supervise and conduct censuses throughout the country; and (ii) the Industrial Statistical act,1942, which enables collection of industrial statistics without adequate concern for confidentiality of data and building trust among the data producers and data compiler. Statistical reporting is not ensured through legal mandate. In fact, data collection is based on voluntary responses. In order to streamline and rationalize statistical activities and specifically empower the BBS to perform its data collecting functions ensuring confidentiality of data and build rapport with private and corporate data provider, it is very much desirable to enact a general or an Umbrella Statistical Act in modern lines.

2. **Weak Statistical System at Local level:** BBS have 509 Upazilla Statistical offices located at Upazilla head quarter and 23 Regional Statistical offices located at 23 District head quarter (out of 64 districts). All these offices are very much deficient in adequate/trained manpower, computing equipment, computer-aided data collection system, storage, and retrieval and dissemination system. BBS has no offices at district (41 districts) and divisional level. To strengthen the local statistical system as a source of local statistics, establishment of statistical offices at district and divisional level (to supervise and coordinate the work of district statistical offices) is very much urgent. Besides, the staff members of the statistical

offices at local level should be trained through expanding statistical training courses and programmes. Moreover, local statistical offices (at least district statistical offices) to be equipped with computer and computer aided data collection system should be developed.

3. **Inadequate Human Resource Management and development :** Trained and skilled manpower is inevitable for producing reliable and quality statistical data. In BBS trained and skilled manpower is not adequate. Relevant statistical training programmes to be conducted for upgrading the capabilities of the of the BBS personnel.

4. **Inadequate support to professionalism:** Aptitude and /or expertise in statistics (for example sampling techniques or subject matter area) carry a little or no weight in the process of recruitment/ promotion. The recruitment procedure has a little scope to test the applicant's aptitude or expertise in statistics. Promotion is based only on the seniority measured by the length of service period. Capability/ expertise etc are not given due weight for promotion. Staff members are generally engaged in data collection and compilation. Generally, the staff members of BBS are not normally encouraged or privileged to do research work or analysis data. No standing committee/ working group are there who can review the publication professionally and suggest improvements to maintain the BBS' reputation for professionalism.

5. **Absence of policy guidance body:** Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) yet has no any apex body to work independently for formulating policy

guidelines under the broader framework of the country planning and overall government policy. A powerful and independent policy guidance body is very much necessary to advise BBS about formulating an effective statistical policy and implementing the same in an efficient manner.

6. **Absence of Statistical Training and Research Institute:** Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has no any training institute to upgrade the quality of statistical personnel and expand the statistical manpower to support the needs of the statistical system of Bangladesh. In fact, no explicit body is there to oversee the development of national statistical programme and priorities.
7. **Statistical development is not priorities in the national Agenda:** Like many other developing countries, statistical development is not given due weight in the national agenda.
8. **Inadequate budgetary provision:** The present budget allocation is not adequate for implementing the statistical activities smoothly.
9. **Computer equipment is not commensurate with the statistical activities:** Computing resources are not adequate. Computing resources exist for staff at officer's level only. Many of the supporting staff don't have personal computer (PC). The number of PC is significantly below the number required for performing the tasks.
10. **Time lag exists:** Long lag exist between the completion of the survey/ census and the final release of data.
11. **Absence of Data Producers' and Users' Forum:** BBS don't have any structural and periodic process of consultation with user's advisory

committee or working group constituted with the member from policy making ministries/ departments or other key data user's agencies.

3. Recent Innovative Measures for Improvement Official Statistics: The recent Innovative measures taken by BBS are as follows:

A. Innovation in governance

- a. **Statistics Act:** Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics recently has taken initiatives to establish a legal framework (Statistics Act) with regard to the right, responsibilities, and function in relation to the statistical activities performed by BBS. BBS has already drafted the proposed Statistics Act (Statistics Act, 2008) and it is under the process of finalization. BBS hopes that this will come into operation in the early of 2009.
- b. **Set up a policy guidance body:** Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has take initiatives to establish an apex body to work independently for formulating policy guidelines under the broader framework of the country planning and overall government policy. A provision has also been made in the proposed Statistics Act (Statistics Act, 2008) for establishing an apex body named National Statistical Advisory Council. The proposed council will perform the following tasks:
 - To coordinate the function of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and to advise them about formulating an effective statistical policy and implementing the same in an efficient and coordinated way with active participation of relevant Government Departments, other agencies, and the citizens,
 - To help develop programmes/plans in such a way so that duplication is avoided in statistical activities.
- c. **Establish Statistical Training and Research Institute:** Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has no training institute to upgrade the quality

of statistical personnel and expand the statistical manpower to support the needs of the statistical system of Bangladesh. BBS has already launched a development project for establishing an independent Statistical Training and Research Institute. This institute shall have the following functions:

- Conduct statistical training programme to upgrade the quality of statistical personnel and expand the statistical manpower to support the needs of the statistical system,
- Carry out expertise-sharing programme on various statistical aspects with national and international experts,
- Expand and upgrade of statistical training resources and facilities required for training and research programme.
- Undertake research on statistical concepts, definition and methods,
- Promote collaborative research efforts among members of the academic community, data producers and users.

d. Interaction with experts and user's: Currently BBS has taken initiatives to interact with experts and data users to take care of the requirements of the users. Seminars and conferences are also held for larger interaction with academics and users. BBS also provides opportunities for sharing the findings available from census and surveys through workshop and seminar. This is done by BBS to strengthen linkage of BBS with the experts and data users as well as strengthen feedback mechanism.

e. Data storage and retrieval: Recently BBS has currently established a system of data storage and retrieval so that one can access to the ultimate records of the data.

f. Revision and rebasing of CPI: Recently BBS has taken initiatives to revise and rebase Consumer Price Index (CPI). The current base of CPI is 1995-96 and CPI would be rebased with year 2005-06. The existing commodity basket for computing CPI has been reviewed and new basket of commodities with wider coverage have already been constructed.

B. Innovation in Data Collection

g. Improved data collection system: Innovative steps have been adopted by BBS for improvement of data collection. . In order to strengthen the supervision and quality control of data collection in the field level as many as 23 regional (old districts) coordinators were appointed. These coordinators will supervise the data collection of all surveys in their respective jurisdiction. These coordinators will pay visit in their areas on a monthly basis and will report to the Director General BBS about the progress of data collection in their areas. If any problem is observed in their areas, administrative measures will be taken to solve the problem without further delay.

In addition to these regular checks the Director General, Deputy Director General, Directors and other senior officials visit the enumeration area/primary sampling units (PSU) frequently to improve the data collection in the field level.

C. Innovation in Data Dissemination

h. Construction of website of BBS: Recently, BBS has constructed its website. Statistical data and information available from various surveys, censuses conducted by BBS are now put on website of BBS. Besides, all staff at officer level has been recently provided with internet facility.

i. Improved data dissemination system: Currently BBS has been able to improve its data dissemination system at some extent. In the recent past only the hard copies of the various publications published by BBS were available to the users. To day electronic copy of the various publications are also available

for the users. Users can also purchase micro data with a nominal cost. Many of the data are also available at BBS' website.

j. Reduced Time Lag in data dissemination: In the recent time pragmatic steps have been taken to disseminate data as early as possible. The innovative measures that have been taken to reduce time lag of the publication include, among others, formation of publication committee to expedite printing each publication, deployment of more personnel for data processing, strategic plan to reduce time lag of each publication, additional work of publication related personnel beyond office hours. In addition, to cater the need of the users key findings of each survey are prepared within 6-8 months and provided in the web site. The hard copy and the electronic copy of the key findings are also available. As regard to monthly & yearly publications where data are also used from secondary sources, special requests were made to the data producers to provide data at an early date. The publication, are now widely circulated among all stakeholders and feedback from them are sought through demi-official letter from DG, BBS. Key finding of all publication are now available in the web site of BBS which are updated frequently with the latest data.

4. Conclusion

The innovation in governance, data collection and dissemination are a continuous process. NSOs should pursue the innovation in governance, data collection and dissemination all the time to cater the need of the users. In the context of Bangladesh, BBS is always in favour of innovation. The innovative measures described above have brought momentum in the activities of BBS. This initiative will continue in future and BBS will adopt more innovative techniques to bring radical change in its activities to meet the data needs of the users instantly.