

THE OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN NEPAL

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Background

Nepal has a decentralised official statistical system in practice. The current system encompasses Central Bureau of Statistics, Government ministries and agencies, the Central Bank, semi-government agencies and autonomous bodies that produce statistics.

Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) is the major government statistical agency of Nepal. Besides CBS, several ministries and government agencies produce statistics related to their fields of work. Different ministries and government agencies also compile statistics as a by-product of the administrative functions of their organizations. Only a few of these institutions, however, have established statistical units.

At present, Nepal is at the cross roads of political and socio-economic changes. The Government is committed to bringing socio-political changes within the country. Innovations for a “New Nepal” are in great demand. These innovations will significantly affect the national statistical system of the country. This paper¹ highlights the prospects of innovations in the official statistical system of Nepal with reference to governance, data collection and management and data dissemination.

Governance

In the past couple of years, Nepal has experienced highly significant political innovation. The country has been transferred from a monarchy to a republic. The “state restructuring” process is underway. Accordingly, the country has an “Interim Constitution” prepared through a political

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consensus. This Interim Constitution will remain in force until a new Constitution for “New Nepal” is framed by the Constitution Assembly (CA). For this, a 601 member CA has been already formed. As per the present schedule, the new Constitution will be promulgated by the end of May, 2010.

The Interim Constitution has guaranteed several fundamental rights of the people including the right to information and the right to privacy. These rights are in many ways related to statistical innovations in the country.

The Government is committed to developing the statistical system of Nepal. The current “Three Year Interim Plan (2007/08 – 2009/10)” has envisaged the development of “planning and statistical system” in the country. For this purpose the basic objective underlined in the Plan is: “to institutionalize an effective planning system, by developing a reliable statistical system”.

Strategies stated in the “Plan” document for achieving the above objective include “the strengthening and enhancing the capacity of statistics and planning units” in the Government organizations. Further, the working policies outlined for this purpose include, preparation of a framework for the planning and statistical system befitting a new federal structure of the country.

A consolidated national statistical plan (CNSP) for the country has already been prepared. It has laid down provisions for: a functional “designated statistical system”, an efficient “survey clearance system”, an effective high level “national statistical council”, several “technical working groups”, an updated “Statistics Act” and “reorganization” of the CBS. When fully implemented, the CNSP will have a profound innovative impact on the official statistical system of Nepal.

Data Collection and Management

Over the years, some modernization has been observed in data collection as well as in data processing system. In most of the surveys conducted by the CBS, innovative data management techniques, including “a pre-coded questionnaire, decentralized data entry, field verification, and extensive training and supervision of field workers” are followed.

In some of the surveys conducted by the CBS, personal computers are used for data entry “right in the field”. Instead of collecting the filled-in questionnaires at the office for data entry, the data collected in each enumeration area are entered in the field. Thus problems, if any, are solved while the team is still in the field. If problems or errors are found, the interviewers are able to revisit the enumerated households or respondents to correct the data collected. This process of entering, checking and correcting the data in the field has helped to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. It has also reduced the time lag between data collection and data processing.

Further innovation in data management is the “interactive editing of data” in surveys and censuses. This has been a “distinct feature in the data input process”. Traditionally, data editing process used to rely on a “manual review of data by subject matter specialist”. This used to be a very time consuming process and sometimes not feasible too. The “interactive editing” process, on the other hand, is comparatively more efficient because the records are corrected by resolving the flagged errors.

Over the years, there have been improvements in the management of information systems. Reforms, for example, have been initiated in the education management information system (EMIS). There is a plan to further develop the EMIS at the local level. In the health management information system (HMIS), there is a provision in the current plan to make it integrated as well as “inclusive”. Establishment of Government Integrated Data and Training Centre (GIDTC) is underway. The use of microcomputers in various Government institutions is on the increase which can facilitate the compilation of statistics from official records.

Data Dissemination

The main function of data dissemination is to make data available to users as quickly as possible after data collection is complete. In Nepal, the results from censuses and surveys have traditionally been published in hard print reports. In recent years, however, modern methods of data dissemination have been gradually used along with the traditional method.

The modern methods of data dissemination in Nepal include: dissemination in electronic media, and data dissemination workshops at the national and the sub-national levels. CBS has been striving to disseminate data in electronic media. Census results previously published in hard print

copies have also been converted into electronic formats and published in CD's. Also, data dissemination has been timelier in the recent years.

In recent years, MDG related indicators are on demand. Besides, the census and survey output tables have been made more gender sensitive. Gender and age disaggregated tables are generated wherever possible.

To facilitate the specific user's need, micro-data are being released with due protection of individual confidentiality. Micro-data of household surveys conducted by the CBS, for example, are made available to users on request. About 12 percent of the population census micro-data has been put in the public domain and also released in CD to facilitate the analyses according to the user's needs. The CBS publications can also be downloaded from its website: <http://www.cbs.gov.np>

Conclusion

Innovation in official statistical system encompasses a wide range of issues. It should be understood in several contexts such as technical, financial, leadership, social and professional context. The innovations in the national statistical system of Nepal are lagging behind of many other countries. However, in the context of enormous development in the ITC and the facilities available to producers as well as to the users, the Government is committed to the development of the overall statistical system of the country.

At present, Nepal is at a juncture of political and socio-economic changes. The present Interim Constitution of Nepal is determined for the innovation based on "the progressive restructuring of the state in order to resolve the existing problems of the country relating to class, caste, region and gender". The Government has a vision of "prosperous, modern and just" new Nepal. The Constituent Assembly has initiated the work for the preparation of a new Constitution for a republic Nepal.

To fulfil the determination of the Nepalese people, the system of official statistics in Nepal should also be innovative in all respects. The system should be able to cater the demand of new Nepal. Hence, in addition to whatever little innovations have been achieved to date, a considerable change is expected in the national system of official statistics in the coming days.