

Collaborative efforts to enhance statistical training



Global Network of Institutions
for Statistical Training (GIST)

Update on status of work

Introduction/Overview

The range and depth of data demands emerging out of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are unprecedented and present a substantial challenge for national statistical systems in all countries. Significant efforts are required to strengthen national statistical capacities to provide the necessary data and statistics for the full implementation of the 2030 agenda, as recognized by the UN General Assembly, in its resolution 71/313. The Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Data also highlights statistical training as an essential action area.

Statistical training is key in strengthening countries' statistical capacities. Many international and regional institutions work in this area, but due to demand diversity, there can be overlap in available courses, significant variation in clientele and prior training and use of a variety of approaches. The Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training (GIST) was therefore established in 2018 at the 49th Session of the UN Statistical Commission to facilitate more coordination and help harmonize statistical training.

GIST is a network of international and regional training institutions, as well as a selection of countries, which provide statistical training. GIST aims to contribute to building sustainable statistical capacities through efficient, effective, and harmonized delivery of training.

The strategic action areas of GIST are:

- a. Conduct a preliminary assessment to redefine country needs in wake of the new demands arising out of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs;
- b. Assess training gaps vis-à-vis the training needs of countries to systematically address them;
- c. Systematically share training courses and calendars, training materials through a web-based platform;
- d. Build a community of practice through sharing of knowledge, materials, experience and expertise;
- e. Harmonize statistical training courses/curricula in line with international guidelines and standards on concepts and methods;
- f. Build capacities of existing statistical training centres to deliver training on official statistics based on harmonized and agreed training curricula;
- g. Promote training that enables data producers to improve data literacy and usage within stakeholder communities;
- h. Develop and nurture pools of trainers in all regions on different statistical areas and maintain a roster of resource persons that can be used by countries as and when required;

- i. Foster a global discussion on certification; and
- j. Leverage capacity for increased use of distance learning.

For more general information on GIST, see: <https://unstats.un.org/GIST>

In the first year of GIST's work, four task teams were established to work along different streams. A consultant was also hired to do a baseline assessment on availability of trainings among GIST members and needs of the National statistical system. Among others, this resulted in an inventory of courses at that point in time. The inventory and more information on the work carried out in the first year can be found here: <https://unstats.un.org/gist/resources/Outputs-from-Task-Teams/>

The work of the group in the last year (since March 2019)

At the 50th Statistical Commission in 2019, it was decided that GIST would refocus its work based on the outcomes of the work of 2018, and the initial task teams were re-engineered to be replaced by three task teams on;

- i) how to better address needs of statistical offices in a coordinated manner;
- ii) online gateway and e-community of practice;
- iii) statistical literacy.

The three task teams all have members from a sub-set of the agencies that are GIST members. They have all had several calls to agree on the area of focus and its implementation. Due to challenges in defining the work and limitations in resource availability, the task teams have progressed at different speeds. Participation and contribution of the various members has varied from participation in all or almost all calls, to no interaction. The variation is about the same for international agencies, regional institutes as well as countries. Below is a summary of work of each of the task teams and a suggested way forward.

GIST is currently chaired by Helen MacGillivray, ISI. The Secretariat role of UNSD is managed by Vibeke Oestreich Nielsen

ii) Addressing NSO needs

Task team lead: none

The overall idea of the task team is to get a better understanding of potential gaps in statistical training and how to address these. This could be addressed both from the perspective of a needs-assessment as well as an assessment of gaps in availability of training. Although some information exists, there is no full picture available of what the needs of NSOs are and the task team had a difficult start in making the assessment without burdening the NSOs with questions and assessments.

The task team considered a better structuring of the course inventory which was collected in the first year. The idea was to structure courses along SDGs and the General Statistical Business

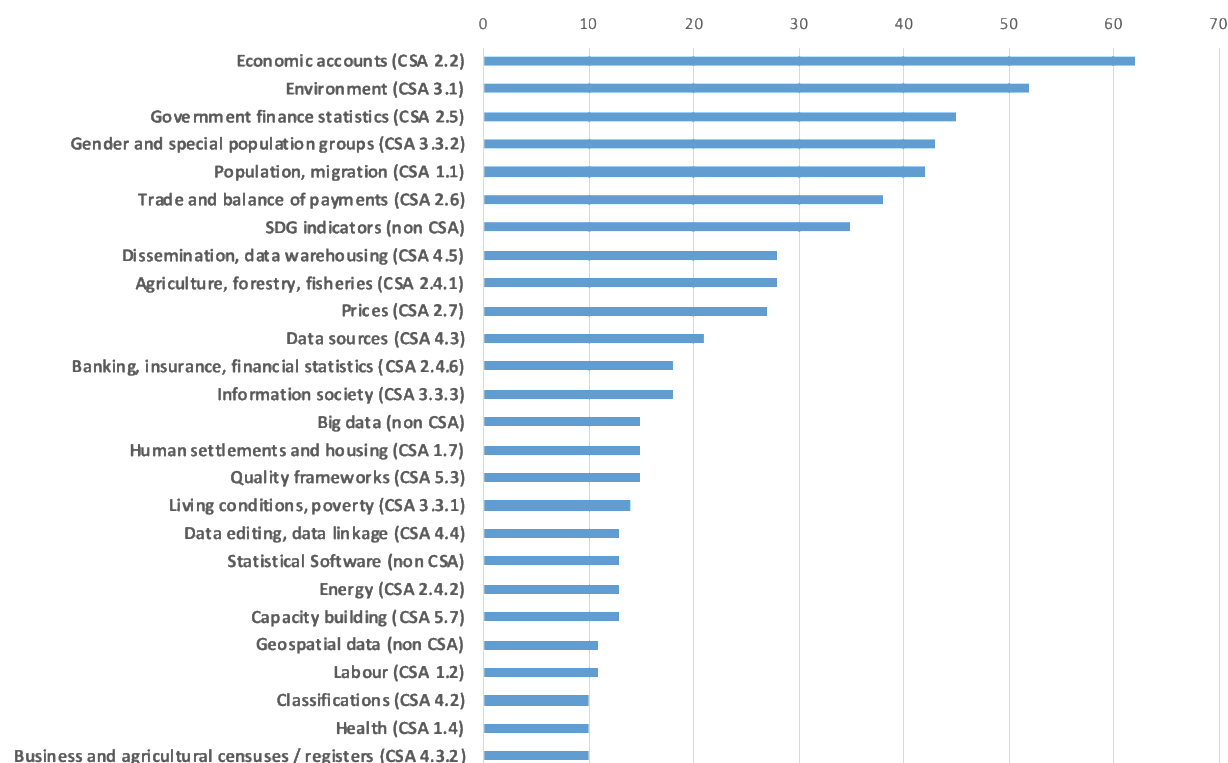
Process Model (GSBPM). Three UNSD staff tried filling a random selection of 20 courses individually, with the results clearly demonstrating the challenges in this area:

- There were significant differences in the specifications made by the three staff.
- They all felt that they had too little information to do a proper job as limited information about the courses was available in the inventory. For both GSBPM and SDGs it therefore was often difficult to understand what goes where.
 - For GSBPM many of the courses could potentially inform all processes.
 - For the SDGs, it was also not always clear and could give the impression of misleading as each goal does have many indicators –

The group therefore agreed not to proceed with further work along this line.

Alternative approaches for obtaining an overview of current training availabilities were discussed. The online gateway under development by task team two (online gateway) was still in too early a stage. A calendar of events, under development by UNSD, did, however, provide useful insight on the current course provision. The calendar uses web-scraping to find courses and categorizes them by statistical activity (CSA). While not complete as not all available courses are web-scrapable, it gives a clearer view on the distribution of courses. See below:

**Events by Statistical Activity 2017-2019
(only activities with min. 10 events)**



Further, the report of the consultant in 2018 included findings from interviews with 9 countries which were selected from the countries that are either GIST members or part of the GIST advisory group. (See annex 1 for a brief summary of findings from these interviews.) This led to

a discussion on the importance of coordination among entities providing trainings. Particularly when there are clear unmet needs, it was discussed how GIST as a Network jointly can address these needs, how to identify a leading organization and how the training programme could be rolled out. An example was given of a CRVS e-learning course where the World Bank took the lead and where other partners contributed. This type of collaboration will not always be straight forward, demonstrating both the challenges for GIST and the importance of it.

The task team agreed to look more into collaboration on statistical training and also more widely on coordination to support areas where no-one has a clear mandate. Potentially, regional training institutes which have a main mandate of providing trainings rather than covering a specific area of work could play a leading and coordinating role here.

As a first step, a few concrete case studies will be developed based on the experience and understanding of the task team members. The case studies will showcase examples of areas where there are many actors and where coordination is key in order to use resources efficiently, gender statistics being a good example. Other case studies will discuss areas where there is no agency that has a mandate to work in the area and the area therefore easily is forgotten. The example discussed was guidance on NSS coordination which also has been highlighted as a key challenge in a recent needs-assessment report by FAO. Following this, the task team will discuss possibilities for mechanisms for future coordination for wider training programme development, potential joint coverage of NSO needs that have not been addressed by any partner and aim to provide further inputs on how efforts in statistical training can become more coordinated.

ii) Online gateway and e-community of practice

Task team lead: Ashish Kumar, UNSIAP

Initially, these were two task teams, but the teams decided to combine. It became clear quite early in the discussions of the task team that the establishment of an online gateway or landing page for statistical courses was a priority area. After discussing various options, the group decided to use the newly established UN SDG:Learn which had the same aim in a broader context. UN SDG:Learn was co-created by UNITAR and UNSSC and did already have several partners, including a number of the GIST members.

The overall aim of such a gateway or landing page is to make it easier for those who are in need of training in statistics to see what is available by visiting only one page instead of having to visit various portals. It will also help the training community to increase collective knowledge, improve collaboration and better coordinate their work.

Throughout second half of 2019, the task team discussed various aspects of the gateway including;

- *looks of the platform and what to include*: The current looks were agreed. It was agreed to include face-to-face and e-learning course, but to leave out microlearning on the statistics landing page for the time being.

- *taxonomies (categories)*: it was agreed to keep the three taxonomies already available, and to add a fourth one on statistical categories. The statistical categories are loosely based on the CSA, but reduced and simplified to make it more user friendly
- *quality aspects*: There was a desire among some members to set up quality criteria to guide those who would upload courses in what the requirements are. This would also allow the administrators to reject courses if criteria were not followed. A first draft of the guidelines is now available and focuses on quality of statistics content and pedagogical approach.
- *governance structure*: It was agreed that UNSD would have the administration and management rights of the statistics landing page.
- *Access and visibility*: All GIST members would get access even though they were not formal partners in UN SDG:Learn. They would also get their logos and names on all courses that would be uploaded to which they contributed.

The statistics landing page was made available to members in mid-February for uploading of course information. It will be officially launched at the open GIST side-event on Monday 2nd March during lunchtime. The landing page can be found under the following link: www.unsdglearn.org/statistics. It is a dedicated landing page for statistics courses provided by various GIST members.

Throughout the process, UNITAR provided much guidance based on their earlier experience. They also made the development of the statistics landing page possible by making financial resources available to GIST so that a development team could create the statistics landing page according to the needs specified by the group.

The work on the gateway has taken much of the time of the task team which in periods has met more than once a month. Next steps in this part of the work will be to discuss the availability of the statistics gateway to personnel in the statistical community and also amongst those who are likely to be interested due to their professional requirement. In this regard it will be important to promote the gateway through various channels. This will already start at the Statistical Commission and several of the GIST members have already offered to promote the gateway on their hopepages which is a very good start. When sufficiently populated with courses, the gateway will also be a useful tool for task team one.

Moving forward, this task team will also aim to focus more on building an e-learning community of practice. FAO and IBGE have already shared some of their experiences in the field and this has been very useful to other task team members, and the aim is to think further in the area.

iii) Statistical literacy

Task team lead: Elena Proden, UNITAR

The task team led the planning of a webinar on statistical literacy which was part of the webinar series of the World Data Forum. The webinar took place in September 2019 and had three speakers, all linked to GIST. Victoria Glasier from US Census Bureau presented their work on improving literacy among children/students, François Fonteneau from PARIS21 focused on increasing literacy among journalists and Josefina Almeda from the Philippine Statistical

Research and Training Institute (PSRTI) talked about literacy among policy makers. Vibeke Nielsen from UNSD chaired the webinar which had around 200 online participants. More information about the event can be found here: (scroll down to 6th September)

<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/undataforum/webinar/index.html>

Following this, the task team has sought to concretize its work. Although there is an enormous literature on statistical literacy, and extensive resources, much is in general contexts or oriented to broad curricula. With an unclear picture of what is already available that is most relevant and useful for GIST, it was agreed to first bring together the experiences and knowledge of the task team members and then discuss further what can be done jointly. This is currently work in progress and will be an important starting point for further elaboration of work.

Linked to the task team and earlier findings of the GIST literacy survey, UNITAR has been developing an e-learning course on statistical literacy targeting policy makers, using consultants with significant expertise and experience in this area. The course will soon be made available on the statistics landing page and UNITARs homepage. Other GIST members have contributed input to the development. Other members, including ECE and UNSD, are also working on materials which are focusing on improving statistical literacy, especially as it pertains to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Key events in 2020

GIST focused proposals have been submitted to both the IAOS in May and the UN WDF in October 2020. If these are accepted, this will also be an opportunity to promote the work of the Network. This may help in getting funding for GIST related work in the longer run. The international meetings may also be possible venues for in-person meetings of the GIST.

Annex 1: Key findings from needs assessment by consultant

Below a summary of the findings from a needs assessment that was carried out by a consultant for GIST in 2018 and early 2019. In total, the consultant interviewed 9 countries selected from those that are either GIST members or part of the GIST advisory group. The selection is limited and very few of these countries are least developed countries, so the responses may not be representative of a wider group of countries that need trainings the most. Key findings were:

- Limited resources are the main challenge for the training in official statistics
- There are challenges with participation at international training courses in statistics as the right person is not always sent, and information is also often not shared upon return.
- Another challenge is the language in international trainings in official statistics.
- The involvement in the trainings of other data producers in the NSS and the users is essential for the development of the whole NSS.
- NSOs need the trainings in almost all areas of statistics. Recurring topics mentioned were: administrative registers, new data sources including big data, strategic and managerial issues, communication with users and data visualization, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related topics, environmental statistics and data analysis.
- There is a need for more online courses, online training materials and open source materials. A combination of trainings is needed (face to face, online courses, combination of them)
- There is a need for the development of an electronic platform for sharing training programmes and training materials.
- The NSO representatives see GISTs main potential in creating synergy. The cooperation and coordination among the network members is critical and can reduce duplications of work
- Visibility is another key issue for GIST. The web site of the global network should be regularly updated and more active. It should have some information on trainings and ensure sharing of the sources as well as online courses, electronic documents and training materials. Further, new technologies and new trends in statistics should be covered.