

National, regional and global coordination of statistical capacity building

Background paper for the HLG (as of 22 May 2019)

Coordination of statistical capacity building activities is a recurring topic viewed as an essential element of successful, coherent delivery. From a general perspective, the case for coordination can be summarized as identifying and implementing activities with the highest return. From the statistical side, better coordination could ensure the widest impact on the statistical systems as a whole and its ability to respond to the data needs of the 2030 agenda. And regardless of the perspective, coordination can contribute to better efficiency of projects, economies of scale and minimized duplication of work. It is also important to note, that coordination can find place on both the recipient and donor sides. Both can lead to greater impacts of statistical capacity building activities.

For the purpose of this paper, three levels of coordination can be distinguished:

Levels of coordination

National

At the national level, it is important that both internal and external activities offered to the statistical system be organized to the extent possible and there should be an effort to coordinate the various activities being planned by different donors to avoid duplication. A comprehensive overview of the different donors, activities, key players, and the related sectors will help to ensure that all domains are covered.

Within the national statistical system, one element aiming at better coordination could be a dialogue between producers of data and statistics to determine who can most benefit from a capacity building activity and, in consequence, who should participate in the activity. The dialogue can include past, ongoing and planned capacity building activities. Reviewing past activities could help determine whether there is still need for assistance from 'outside' of the country, whether cooperation with national partners could be sufficient for future improvements, or in any other way could help shaping future activities. The dialogue around ongoing and planned activities could help in identifying gaps in the statistical capacity activities. Also, reviewing activities will help determine if there are other groups than the primarily targeted national producers of statistics who could benefit from capacity building activities. This would allow for a broader reach of activities, by attempting to 'fit' these additional groups into the work.

Finally, expanding dialogue on capacity building to the different parts of the system provides an opportunity to compare whether similar activities across different national producers of statistics are financed by different donors. This type of review could contribute to streamlining of activities.¹ As there are

¹ Work with population registers can be mentioned here as an example of an activity involving several stakeholders that could require coordination, as both national producers of statistics and other governmental agencies can benefit from capacity building activities in this field.

many different actors in a country, a better understanding of the different initiatives related to statistics would ensure less overlap, and hopefully, stronger statistical systems.

Regional

In a similar way, coordination at the regional level is about identifying what statistical systems from different countries (in best scenario represented by national statistical offices) could benefit from similar capacity building activities financed by donors. Additionally, statistical offices together with regional commissions could think across ongoing/possible activities and consider which of those could provide the biggest wins both for statistical systems in individual countries and at the regional level. Such an approach would also send a signal to donors on a common ambition of most efficient allocation of money.

Global

In line with regional coordination, this level is about identifying, what capacity building activities could have highest return on a global scale, i.e. maximizing the number of countries in different regions that could draw benefits of pooled activities. By better understanding the activities and their interconnectedness at the global level, the activities can be better coordinated and delivered in a more efficient manner.

Furthermore, as described in the HLG paper *'Better Data for Sustainable Development: Implementing the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Data for the 2030 Agenda'*, one of the possible actions to improve coordination could be developing a database of vetted needs and ongoing projects helping donors and other stakeholders in identifying activities that could benefit more than just one recipient. Along these lines, the database could provide background on whether and what global capacity building initiatives can be matched with each other and, equally important, provide information on what possible combination of projects could give most 'bang for the buck'. The database in itself should not provide an 'either or' answer to what activities are to be prioritized and financed by donors, but a general information on activities within and priorities of national statistical systems.

One of the conditions for entering such a database could be participation in national and regional coordination. Furthermore, participation in such a database and the opportunities it brings, could give an incentive to national statistical systems and national governments to outline a strategic direction for a national statistical system as a whole and prioritize what statistical areas are most in need for capacity building in order to ensure the necessary evidence for policy-making in a given country.

Donor coordination

The different, but equally important perspective, is coordination on the donor side. In case of statistics, as five major donors conduct a clear majority of capacity building, this could seem to be relatively feasible. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

From the donor side, the biggest benefit of coordination could be financing activities which would provide the highest returns, while avoiding over- and/or underfinancing. An important precondition in this aspect is transparent information from the donors on planned activities, both regarding the contents of activities and geographical location. Such transparency could influence behavior – for example, potentially reduce financing for an area that already is over-financed and maybe rescaling a project that has a limited likelihood of success. Probably, the best scenario would be to create corresponding transparency on the

recipient and the donor side. Optimally, such coordination and transparency would not only cover statistical activities but also other substantial activities conducted in individual countries that can have components of relevance to statistics, and vice versa (e.g. activities relating to business policy).

However, as previous experiences show, coordination of capacity building on the donor side can be hard to achieve. Lack of common interests that can unite donors can be one of the explanations. Donors have their own agendas that in some cases can require quick solutions. In such cases, a wider coordination could be seen as a hindrance for the effectivity. In this context, the proposed database with information on statistical needs and projects could prove to be an asset. Obviously, member states cannot re-channel donor interests, as they are bound to a mandate, but the overarching aim could be to identify capacity building activities that bridge donor priorities and country needs.

Items for consideration

Coordination must build on a commitment and goodwill from the involved stakeholders. The HLG provides transparency and has a clear and recognizable international mandate for playing a role in statistical capacity building in relation to the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan and improving the data situation for the follow up on the SDGs. The items below are a proposal for a possible discussion points for the HLG.

Items for consideration:

- Could it be of value to follow up on the past coordination initiatives and investigate what has worked? Does anyone have any main lessons learned from this type of analysis?
- Are there any concrete, measurable short-, medium-, and long term coordination activities that can have high benefit, and in consequence, something the HLG can propose to start working on?
- How does coordination at the national, regional and international level overlap?
- What could be the role of the regional commissions, or other regional bodies, such as Asian Development Bank or African Development Bank, in providing more coordinated activities?
- In order to improve coordination, it would be useful to better understand those aspects of coordination that are most appealing to donors. Does the HLG agree that it could be beneficial to have an exchange of views with the donors on what form of coordination they could be interested in (either directly or building up on Bern Network)?
- Is outlining best practices in exchange of information on statistical capacity building with other national authorities a possibility? If so, what are some examples of best practices? How would the HLG go about gathering this information?
- Could cooperation with other stakeholders in the field, such as OECD DAC Committee, CCSA, World Bank and others contribute to better coordination?