

Adjusting the Organization of National Statistical Systems to Emerging Issues¹

Central Statistics Organization, Afghanistan

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I. BACKGROUND

With more than two decades of war, most of the institutions including the statistical system were devastated. The last Census of Population that took place in the country was in 1979. This long absence of any data collection activity resulted in inability of statistical system to cope with the growing need for data. After the fall of the Taliban government in 2001, data collection activities were carried out independently by different ministries according to their own needs and requirements mostly with the assistance of the international community, non-governmental organizations, or ad-hoc data collectors. This left the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) with insufficient capacity it had to respond to the growing data needs of the country, particularly after 2001, the fall of the Taliban.

In 2006, the Statistics Law of the country was renewed to improve the overall statistical system in the country. Based on the law, CSO is responsible for the collection, compilation, analysis, and publication of statistical information relating to commercial, industrial, financial, social, economic, environmental, and general activities and social conditions. The law also states that CSO shall collaborate with ministries and other government organizations in collecting, compilation and publication of statistical information.

In order to support CSO in its undertaking and to strengthen the overall statistical system in the country, the National Statistical Committee was formed with the First Vice President of the country as its chairman and President General of CSO as the committee's secretary. Representatives of different ministries, academic institutions and private sectors are its

members. The committee is supposed to have at least two meetings in a year.

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II. WAY FORWARDS

Just like any statistical organization, Afghan Central Statistics Organization is committed to provide timely and accurate information on national and local issues concerning population and economy. However, two major activities have to be done first in order to pursue this commitment. One is capacity building of CSO and another close coordination between government and the private sector.

A. Capacity Building

CSO has to build its capacity to undertake any data collection activity. Several programmes and plans are underway for the uplifting of standards in the organization such as trainings, recruitment of qualified staff, purchase of new tools and equipment for the operations, continuous evaluation of the qualifications of personnel, hiring of international statistics experts through the help of international organizations, and others. At present, these are made possible through the support we receive from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which has been assisting CSO particularly with regard to Population and Housing Census since 2001. Also, Asian Development Bank has been helping the Integrated Business and Enterprise Survey (IBES) and UNICEF has been involved in capacity building through provision of equipment and training in Dev-Info as well as in computer and English courses. However, these are only few important initiatives. There is still a huge work to be done in order to make this organization play its role at the center of Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS). Finally CSO has to become fully functional and professional statistical organization to provide most of the required data and meet most of the needs of the government and other users.

While there are several donors to help reconstruction of the country, including the statistical system, the process should be integrated so that there is no conflicting, duplicated and piece by piece support received from donors. This way, not only donor's fatigue will be eliminated but it will ensure that the whole area of institutional statistical capacity building will be addressed - concentration will not only be in data collection but in other areas such as management, field coordination, research, publicity, analysis, data storage, publication and dissemination of information.

Plan for re-structuring and strengthening CSO will not only focus on the Central Office but on the field offices, as well. Accuracy and reliability of data rest heavily on the capability of the field offices and the staff to undertake data collection activities. While CSO has already established 34 Provincial Offices in the country, we have not initiated establishment of District Offices. This is very important as far as CSO field representation is concerned. Without this, any statistical undertaking will not be successful enough. Since, this will require huge funding and other resources from the Government; we plan establishment of the offices including recruitment of District Statistics Officers on priority basis and not all at once.

B. Coordination

A smooth and cohesive coordination among the different agencies is always considered an effective thrust towards achievement of results. As mentioned earlier, CSO is the core of the statistical system of Afghanistan and leads most of the statistical activities in the country. However, due to insufficient capacity of the CSO in undertaking data collection activity in most areas such as health, agriculture, education, etc. a good number of ministries and organizations do carry out their own surveys while coordinating them with CSO.

It may however, be noted that CSO has began an information campaign to let all the entities particularly the foreign organizations know that no nationwide statistical data collection activity shall be done by any ministry

or private body without proper involvement of CSO and coordination with it. This is not only to ensure that there are no duplication of results coming out from different agencies, but also to ensure that CSO will be able to build capacity through learning-while-working approach.

CSO will ensure that NSC will meet regularly to address a number of issues confronting the statistical system. CSO will take an active role in bringing to the committee the promotion and development of integrated social and economic statistics throughout the country and the coordination of unified plans for the integration. Also, in order to deal with various issues (old or emerging) and sectors in the country, particularly development of CSO's agricultural department and undertaking surveys creation of the following Technical Working Groups (TWG) will be suggested to NSC:

1. TWG on Poverty,
2. TWG on Labor and Employment,
3. TWG on Health,
4. TWG on Education,
5. TWG on Housing,
6. TWG on Population,
7. TWG on Agriculture, and
8. Other TWGs that may be deemed necessary.

These TWGs will be composed of technical experts from concerned ministries and agencies. They will be in charge of drafting standard statistical concepts and definitions, procedures for proper coordination among entities.

III. **POSITIVE NOTES**

We, at CSO, firmly believe that even if there are hindrances and difficulties, we want to take necessary steps to achieve our goals. However, we have a long way to go before we could be at least, at par with our neighbors. We are pretty confident that with the help of God

and the support of the international community as well as the help of our friends and the statistical organizations in the region we will overcome the enormous problems ahead and accomplish the tasks of rebuilding Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan.