

COUNTRY PAPER (BHUTAN)

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A. Improving coordination in National Statistical System

Since late 1970s, with the pace of rapid development, the need for data within the government increased drastically; hence the “Statistical Cell” was gradually strengthened and expanded as Central Statistical Organization (CSO).

There were many instances to streamline and strengthen the statistical system. The most recent one being the centralization policy initiated in 1994 where all the statistical activities of the sectors along with their statistical staff were pulled into the CSO office. This strategy however, did not materialize as the proposal was not carried out completely except for the transfer of a few staff from the sectors. In view of this, it was once again initiated to further revitalize the national statistical system where roles and responsibilities of the CSO were redefined with internal restructuring of the office. Further in 2003, CSO was granted an autonomous status and renamed as the “National Statistics Bureau” (NSB) mandated as the central authority to coordinate all statistical activities. The NSB was guided by the National Statistical Board chaired by a Cabinet Minister with members from line ministries. Under the new arrangements, the NSB reports directly to the Prime Minister.

However, there is still the need for developing a coordinated framework of statistical system in terms of data gaps, duplications, professionalism, coordination, data accessibility, and dissemination issues.

Government Order of October 2003 established the NSB as the main coordinating statistical agency in the country, with an autonomous status and its own budget. The NSB has also the responsibility of producing fundamental statistics: population census, national accounts, price statistics, poverty statistics etc and other statistical publications that do not fall within the responsibility of any sector agency

An Executive Order of the Prime Minister in 2006 has reaffirmed that the NSB is the “central authority for collection and release of any official data, and their custodian. As such all ministries, departments and agencies are directed to acquire prior approval from the NSB on all statistical matters”. NSB’s coordination activities include collection of data from the line Ministries and agencies to prepare the general publications, providing some support to the other data producers to carry out surveys (households sample selection, questionnaire preparation, data checking and processing).

With decentralization of planning processes, the NSB has deputed one Statistical officer in each district to coordinate activities at the district level.

The ministries/agencies will now have statistical personnel in different ministries/agencies to be the key focal person for statistics. This mechanism will help in liaising with NSB and other sectors and districts in all statistical activities.

The producers and users in the statistical system expect a stronger support from NSB in some areas, mainly on i) Methodology: sample surveys, census ii) Human resource staff and training iii) Data dissemination: easy access to all the data produced by the statistical system.

The draft Statistics Act has explicitly recommended instituting a Statistical Advisory Committee and Technical Working Members to improve the coordination mechanism. The ministry of Health for example, has set up coordination mechanism with their partner for specific statistical operations where by the Board meets at regular time and gathers all the producers of information. Such mechanism is important in improving coordination.

The National Statistics Development Strategy (NSDS) which is currently being prepared would address the current issues of the statistical system within the framework of the assessment of the Bhutan Statistical System (BSS). Certainly, it will provide realistic and practical solution encompassing the coordination issues.

B. Autonomy of National Statistical Offices

Towards the end of 2003, with the major restructuring of the government, the CSO was granted the autonomous status and renamed as the “National Statistics Bureau” (NSB). The NSB since then has its own budget provisions, sufficient equipment, enough stationery and improved manpower to carry out its responsibilities. The NSB was guided by the National Statistical Board whose members were drawn from the line ministries. The National Statistical Board was chaired by a Cabinet Minister. Under the recommendation of the “Good Governance Plus” of 2005, the NSB reports directly to the Prime Minister.

An Executive Order of the Prime Minister in 2006 has reaffirmed that the NSB is an Apex body of statistics whereby all ministries, departments and agencies are directed to acquire prior approval from the NSB on all statistical matters. Thus, NSB is now an independent regulating body on statistical activities.

The NSB, as mandated, carries out statistical activities, including conduct of surveys/censuses, publications of statistical reports (which are not in the purview of other sectors) without having to route through any administrative layers. However, NSB always constitute Technical Working Group and seek views of the other sectors so that the partners of the statistical system are on board.

As an autonomous body, The NSB has coordinated the statistical surveys, initiated in drafting of Statistical Act, assessment of the BSS and hence the development of NSDS, among other activities.

C. How can we increase user engagement?

During the past decade, there has been an increasing awareness on statistics among the users and especially the decision-makers. However, the country's statistical information system was relatively weak due to the lack of reliable base data, mainly the population and housing data. Therefore, Population and Housing Census of Bhutan (PHCB) 2005, has given a strong basis for a broader use of statistical data. Some of the users of the statistics are: 1) Ministries and other government bodies 2) Research centres 3) Civil society: professional organisations, media 4) Donors

The statistical units and offices work closely with main users of (Govt. and Donors) in framing work plans, implementation of activities including the conduct of surveys/census and preparation of statistical reports. This has offered as a platform for sound feedback and clarification, quality improvement and as a coordination mechanism to fulfill the needs of the users.

The conduct of statistical workshops and trainings to users has been one area of activity that would enhance user engagement.

D. How useful are Administrative Data for Statistical Purposes?

Administrative data are usually collected and disseminated at specified time, given the nature of information. For example, The Education Management Information System (EMIS) is the primary data source on education managed by the Ministry of Education. Data collected covers pupils (per age, sex, class, and other individual information), teachers, school facilities, etc. per school and are compiled and published annually. Like education statistics, which contains wealth of information, administrative data is important to monitor the progress with shorter time intervals unlike survey data. Therefore, it has advantage over a survey where it is usually conducted with some time lag. Surveys are expensive and dependable on funding source. It is not uncommon that, surveys can't be carried out as planned. Therefore, administrative record is the alternative source of information for all planning purposes and program implementation. In certain cases, administrative data provides a way to counter check and validate the survey data.

E. Role of National Statistical Offices in Analysis, including the provision of microdata

NSB publishes analyzed reports of the surveys conducted by it. It also collects secondary data and produce reports such as National Accounts Statistics. However, analyses of some of the reports, that the office lacks expertise, have to be relied on the international consultants.

NSB as articulated in the mandate provides technical assistance to the other sectors. NSB assisted Office of the Census Commissioner in the analysis and generation of PHCB 2005 results, Anti-Corruption Office for its Corruption Perception Survey.

Apart from the information contained in the reports, NSB is overwhelmed with the increasing demand for specific information requirements or indicators from the micro-data. Hence, it is now inevitable that we have to share the micro-data. However, micro-data are shared maintaining the confidentiality (by removing key identifications) and one is required to agree that it should be used only for the stated purpose.

F. Adjusting the Statistical Organization to Emerging Statistical Issues

The NSB, the then CSO gradually went through different phases of transformation to suit the needs of the time and to respond to the emerging needs and to effectively respond to needs of data users and as well maintaining the standards. Strengthening of the office, centralizing of statistical activities at CSO, revitalization of statistical system exercise, autonomy to NSB are important phases of adjustment to time, though every phase would not have been aptly responsive. Nonetheless, there has been commitment from the Government to improve the statistical system as whole.

Statistical organization in the statistical system cannot remain complacent. The increasing need for data at disaggregated level is on the rise. There is a need to improve the collection of data, standardization of concepts and definitions, dissemination of statistics in more user-friendly format, among others. It certainly needs to move step wise.

Currently, NSB has carried out the assessment of Bhutan's statistical system to identify the main issues the National Statistical Development Strategy (NSDS) should address.

We affirm that periodical assessment of statistical system is indispensable to befittingly adjust emerging needs of statistical issues.