Introduction

1. Statistical information is critical to the proper functioning of a modern society. Without reliable statistics based on good data, the quality of decision-making, the allocation of resources, and the ability of policy makers, businesses and the general public to understand the social and economic situation of the country would be severely impaired.

Importance of quality at the Central Statistical Office

2. The Central Statistics Office (CSO), being the main producer of statistics in Mauritius, plays an essential role in the production and dissemination of statistical information. The credibility of the office in fulfilling this key role rests on its capacity to produce high quality relevant statistical information while being cost efficient and maintaining confidentiality of personal information.

3. Moreover, as the hub of the National Statistical System (NSS) in Mauritius, it has a particularly central role in the evaluation and improvement of quality of data produced in the System.

4. Currently, there is no Quality framework but the quality of the statistics produced by the CSO meets international standards in all its dimensions. We innovate to strictly adhere to the 10 UN fundamental principles of official statistics in the following ways:

UN Principle 1: Relevance, Impartiality and Equal Access

4.1 The CSO produces statistics that meet the test of practical utility. These statistics are made available on an impartial basis to honour citizens’ entitlement to public information.

   i. Relevance: Statistical programmes are reviewed continuously to ensure that statistics produced are demand-driven. Consultations are held with users (including Government, policy makers and technicians, the private sector, labour unions, NGOs and academia) through meetings of the Statistical Advisory Council and its Technical Committees. User surveys have been carried out to assess satisfaction with our products and also to request needs of users.

   ii. Impartiality and equal access: Our statistics inform debate without advocating a particular position. They are released simultaneously to all users on scheduled dates that appear on an advance release calendar posted on our
website at the beginning of each year. All statistics produced, including publications are posted on CSO’s website where they can be accessed free of charge.

**UN Principle 2: Professional Standards and Ethics**

4.2 In the discharge of his functions, the Director is not subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority. Only strictly professional considerations dictate the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistics produced by the CSO.

**UN Principle 3: Accountability and transparency**

4.3 To facilitate a correct interpretation of published data, the CSO provides information on the sources, methods and procedures used for producing the statistics. Users are also informed about the limitations of statistics published and major changes in concepts and methods which may affect comparability over time. The office has also started posting on its website methodology using the IMF DQAF format.

The quality of our statistics with respect to integrity, methodological soundness, accuracy, reliability, serviceability and accessibility have been assessed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2001 and 2007 using the Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF). Mauritius has adhered to the IMF’s General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) in 2001, and intends to graduate to the more stringent Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) next year.

It is proposed that the CSO publish a list of official statistics every year and ensure that an assessment of the quality of official statistics is carried out by an independent and competent body at least once every 3 years.

**UN Principle 4: Prevention of misuse**

4.4 According to the Statistics Act 2000, the Statistics Advisory Council may issue public statements on any matter, after consultation with the Ministry or Government Department or other agency involved, if any, on the matter in question. It is proposed to amend the Act so that the Director may comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics published by CSO.

**UN Principle 5: Cost effectiveness**

4.5 The judicious choice of our inputs is the foundation of our statistical system:

- We make use of administrative sources of data, wherever available, to reduce cost and response burden.
- We have recourse to primary sources of data collection when administrative records do not exist or are not relevant.

We are making extensive use of IT for data collection, processing, analysis and dissemination for cost reduction at all levels. The office is implementing an e-Business plan. One important aspect of the plan is to put in place a centralized database linking data from different sources and to provide a networked environment for effective sharing and analysis of data at lower cost.

The development of IT would ultimately result in a change in the staff profile of the office with a reduction of staff at the lower grades and redeployment of other existing
professional staff. With the proposed recruitment of multi-disciplinary professionals, it is foreseen that the CSO would be in a better position to do more analytical work without additional cost.

**UN Principle 6: Confidentiality**

4.6 Individual information is treated in strict confidence by the CSO. We have the following safeguards:

- We do not enter individual names of persons in our databases.
- We do not publish individual data and data for small categories that allows for easy identification. We only publish our aggregated statistics.
- We release individual data for research or statistical purposes only and in such a way that does not enable the identification of the particular person or establishment. In the process, elaborate steps are taken to ensure that these conditions are met.
- We adhere to professional ethics – all our officers take an oath of secrecy that they will not divulge any individual information.
- Penalties are provided for in the Statistics Act regarding any breach of confidentiality.

**UN Principle 7: Legislation**

4.7 Our Statistics Act was first passed in April 1951. It was replaced by a modern one, the Statistics Act 2000 in April 2001. We are presently in the process of amending the Statistics Act to cater for coordination of the National statistical System and to enhance the independence of the Director of statistics in the execution of his duties.

**UN Principle 8: Coordination among statistical agencies within the country**

4.8 Coordination among producers of statistics is essential to strengthen the quality, coherence and governance of national statistics and avoiding duplication of work.

With a view to revisit our Statistical System and strengthen coordination among producers of statistics, the CSO has published in 2006 a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) with assistance of the African Development Bank (AfDB) and involving all stakeholders.

The CSO has also signed a MOU with the Central Bank with a view to promote quality statistics and avoid overlapping and duplication in the collection and production of statistical information. The purposes of the MOU are to meet, international obligations, collaborate in the development and implementation of best practices and to assist in the development of methodologies in areas of mutual interest. MOU/official working arrangements with other organizations are being made.

**UN Principle 9: Use of International Concepts, Classifications and Methods**

4.9 In order to ensure good quality and international comparability of our data, we adhere to latest revisions of UN recommendations. Some of the international recommendations used are:

i. System of National Accounts (SNA)
ii. International Standard Industrial Classification of economic activities (ISIC)
iii. International Standard Classification of Occupation (ISCO)
iv. International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)
v. Standard International Trade Classification (SITC)
vi. Central Product Classification (CPC)
vii. Government Finance Statistics (GFS)
viii. ILO recommendations on Labour Statistics and CPI

UN Principle 10: International and regional co-operation

4.10 The CSO participates actively in international and regional projects for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the domain of statistics (e.g. ICP). When needed, we request advice on pertinent methodological issues from international organizations. This contributes to improvement of our official statistics. We cooperate with international and regional bodies such as (i) UN, (ii) IMF, (iii) World Bank, (iv) ILO, (v) ECA, (vi) AfDB, (vii) SADC and (viii) COMESA.

Need for a Data Quality Framework (DQF)

5. As from next year, it is planned that the CSO will publish every year a list of Official statistics and to assist us in this exercise, there is the need to evaluate the statistics that are produced in the NSS. Evaluation of statistics will require a rational, transparent and sustainable framework for assessing the quality of statistics published.

6. The office would therefore need to develop a Data Quality Framework (DQF) this year. This DQF will enhance and extend transparency in data evaluation as it will call on all producers of statistics to be transparent in informing users of the concepts, definitions, classifications, methodologies, and frames used in collecting, processing and analysing their data, as well as informing them on the accuracy of the data, and any other features that may affect the quality of the data or their "fitness for use".

Help needed for CSO to develop a DQF

7. For the development of its DQF, the CSO intends to use those that have already been developed by other countries/organisations such as Canada, UK, South Africa and OECD. We would need technical assistance to advise on the template that we can adopt, procedures to follow to design a DQF and the processes involved for assessment of statistics. Given that the DQF will concern other data producers, we would also need advice of how to get all stakeholders on board during the design stage so as to ensure their collaboration for implementation.

8. Alternatively, if the UN intends to pilot its generic framework, Mauritius could be among the countries where the exercise can be carried out.

CSO
MAURITIUS
May 2010