

## **Government of The Gambia**

### **SUMMARY STRATEGIC PLAN TO IMPROVE THE STATISTICAL SYSTEM AS A VITAL INFORMATION BASE FOR FORMULATING AND MONITORING EFFECTIVE PUBLIC POLICIES TO PROMOTE THE FUTURE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE GAMBIA**

This plan is based on a more detailed report prepared in late 2002 by a World Bank statistical consultant on the strategic and other operational measures needed to restore the official statistical system to its former effectiveness and to make desirable enhancements.

## **I. PLAN OBJECTIVES**

A strategy is only meaningful in relation to the achievement of specified objectives. The objective relevant to this strategic plan comprises the provision of an expanding and adequate range of appropriate specific subject-matter statistics relating to the macro- and micro-performance of the economy, the demography of the nation and its social and environmental situation, all of appropriate concept and specification for governmental and other uses to which such statistics are put. World practice, as indicated by the detailed subject-matter content of official statistical publications of both developing and developed countries provide an authoritative guide, where necessary. Statistical reference and methodological manuals published by the United Nations Statistical Office and regional governmental bodies also provide a further guide. Such standard guidelines are subject, in some cases, to modification when applied to individual countries and this may apply to The Gambia. No catalogue of needed subject-matter statistics is included in this strategic plan statement, therefore.

The Central Statistics Department (CSD) will on a systematic basis, enter into publication exchange arrangements with its counterpart in other appropriate countries, both developing and developed. Almost all national statistics offices welcome such exchanges, which involve no charge except postage. The current relative hiatus in Gambian statistical publications should not be an obstacle to instituting these exchanges.

In addition to the provision of statistical data, there is the further objective of supplying to users so-called meta-statistics, that is, information about the conceptual framework, compilation methodology and other details relevant to user assessment of the accuracy of statistics, as affected by both sampling and non-sampling errors. The IMF's General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) is an authoritative guide for this purpose, but most of its provisions will be too technically ambitious to implement in The Gambia until the end-period of the strategic planning exercise. However, there will be a general longer-term commitment to the implementation of the GDDS.

The final general objective is the institution and maintenance of legal and institutional measures to ensure the political objectivity of official statistical services, both in regard to content and unrestricted access by all categories of users.

The desirable full development of the Gambian statistical system will require significant administrative and technical statistical effort. The task cannot be completed in a year or so. The most realistic appraisal is that it will take intensive effort for at least six years to complete the exercise. Much progress can be made well before the end of this planning period, however, but CSD infrastructure facilities like a computerised integrated central register of all economic units, matched with operational survey procedures, will need extensive development activity. The CSD will prioritise the various strategic measures contained in this plan, taking into account the functional inter-relations between the various measures and their particular development lead times. This will serve as the basis for a detailed, phased development programme.

## II STRATEGY MEASURES TO ACHIEVE PLAN OBJECTIVES

### (1) STAKE-HOLDERS

The community-wide ramifications of any official statistical system lead to a recognition of the various “stake-holders” in the system, all of whom, to varying degrees, must be involved in, and make a contribution to, the successful implementation of the required measures to achieve the plan objectives.

These general stake-holders are (i) the “owner” of the system; (ii) the operator of the system, and (iii) the users of the system outputs. However, these are not, institutionally, mutually exclusive. Thus, while the Government of The Gambia is the owner, it is also an operator in that it supplies data to operate the system and it, furthermore, is a user. The CSD and other statistical units both produce statistics, some of which are used as data for other statistics, while the private sector (business and households) is also a dual stakeholder, both supplying data and using statistics.

All stakeholders are necessarily key elements in the successful attainment of plan objectives. It only takes one stake-holder to fail to perform in one capacity and the whole system is disrupted, with serious community costs.

### (2) OWNER-STAKE-HOLDER MEASURES

#### (i) Institutional Status of the CSD

In order to formally recognise that the CSD’s statistical information service should not, and publicly seem to be not, subject to technical control or influence from the economic policy advisory and implementation machinery of the Government, the CSD will become a separate Department, whose Permanent Secretary will be directly responsible, both statistically and administratively, to the Secretary of State for Economic and Financial Affairs. This will either involve the CSD becoming a Department of State or some other organisational category, such as “Bureau of Statistics” within the Public Service. This is in line with common practice in a number of countries.

The Government has rejected a proposal to convert the CSD into an “Institute of Statistics” outside of the Public Service, as the severing of close administrative links with Public Service Departments of State and other possible undesirable consequences could result, such as reduced cooperation in data supply.

The CSD will be given the informal name of “Statistics Gambia”.

The position of the Head of the CSD, the Director of Statistics, will be restored to the status and grading of that in equivalent Departments and Departments of State and re-designated as the “National Statistician”.

#### (ii) Amendments to the Statistics Act 1972

This enabling legislation for the statistical system will be revised to validate the measures described under (i) and elsewhere in this document. Major changes are also needed to correct unsatisfactory omissions or unclear provisions. In the light of common international practice, the Act will explicitly confer on the National Statistician the legal right to make the technical decisions on the concepts and methodology employed in detailed subject-matter statistics. Statistical objectivity, and the appearance of such, require that this practice be followed.

On the other hand, at present the Director of Statistics appears to have the legal right to decide on what statistics are prepared. This will become the role of the “owner-stakeholder”, represented by the Secretary of State for Economic and Financial Affairs, to whom the National Statistician will be responsible. The Secretary of State will, of course, take the advice of all interest parties, including the National Statistician, the Statistical Advisory Council (see iii), and other appropriate representative bodies and persons on this matter.

The Act will also be amended to validate electronic supply and transmission of data.

(iii) Statistics Advisory Council

While such a council has not been fully successful in all countries which have established one, whatever its role and authority, this Council will be formed in The Gambia, there being strong support for the measure. It will be responsible to the Secretary of State For Economics and Finance. The Council will comprise eight widely representative members, including the National Statistician, who will not have any voting rights. (The National Statistician will retain his separate right to advise the Secretary of State.)

The Council will examine all aspects of CSD operations and the statistical activities of other Government Departments, excluding personnel selection within the CSD and elsewhere. It will publish an annual report setting out its recommendations and views on matters within its area of responsibility. The Council will provide a vehicle for identifying issues and problems in the statistical system and ensuring that these are effectively addressed within Government. The Council will give significant attention to the coordination of the preparation of statistics by all Departments of State

(iv) Staffing of the CSD

The Government accepts that the CSD’s overall staff level is currently inadequate to allow it to restore the full range of statistics that it formerly prepared up to the mid-1990’s, let alone to permit the expansion of statistical outputs that more recent economic and social progress requires. Accordingly, on the basis of equivalent full-time annual staff the CSD’s staff will be restored in the next fiscal year to the previous level of 82. A further gradual enhancement of this total will then be made, culminating in a total of 130 at the end of five years after this base year. This will permit the CSD to develop the minimum range of statistical data (economic, demographic, social and environmental) a progressive developing country of The Gambia’s size and circumstances requires. This total recognises that there are fixed and variable (particularly data collection) staffing requirements and The Gambia, being a small country, is relatively disadvantaged by the needed relatively fixed developmental and controlling staff quotas. This pattern of increase also assumes that an effective solution to the need for adequate interviewer-type data collection arrangements in the informal sector can be found.

(v) Funding

Commensurate increases in governmental funding to those for staff and for the same purpose will also be made. The problem is that practically all regular economic statistics have to be treated as “recurrent” expenditure and require appropriation by the National Assembly. This contrasts with the situation where major demographic and social statistics, such as the population census and household income and expenditure surveys, are not regular continuing surveys and, therefore, are classified as development expenditure items, so being capable of funding, at least in part, by international donor

organizations. The Government will examine this administrative anomaly with the donor organizations to see if, at least a partial solution can be found.

(vi) Data Processing Facilities

As a result of generous international donor funding the CSD will have available adequate data processing facilities for the next statistical development period of five years and later. There is a problem that the CSD will not have access, because of the major cost, to the best available statistical software, but less efficient, if adequate, alternative affordable software will be available.

(vii) CSD Accommodation

The Government will ensure that adequate new suitable accommodation will be progressively provided to the CSD to cope with the expansion of staff, as specified under (iv).

(3) STATISTICAL ORGANISATION-STAKE-HOLDER MEASURES

(viii) CSD Organisational Changes

The CSD will establish a new full Division, under a Divisional Director, handling all economic statistical work, counterparting the current Social Statistics Division and the Data Processing Division, which is also responsible for the Social Data Base. Along with the further new Administration Officer responsible for all staffing, accommodation, printing, library, visitor reception etc. matters, the National Statistician will as a result have more scope to plan and manage the overall detailed expansion of the Department's work, address policy issues and have time for additional outside CSD promotional, user relations etc activity.

The National Statistician will also, in conjunction with his Deputy and Divisional Directors, work toward more efficient coordinated handling of common technical or operational activity and, in addition, establish a central Development, Standards and Methods Section to more effectively handle the introduction of new or revised statistical practices such as sampling, quality-control checks on standards of survey work, study of new internationally promulgated classifications, frameworks etc for official statistics and other central statistical functions which at present are outside the scope of individual subject-matter sections. Overall departmental coordination of activity will also benefit.

(ix) Development of a Computerised Central Register of All Gambian Economic Units

There will be an expansion of micro-economic surveys, both for the purpose of preparing detailed industry statistics and use in the preparation of the Gambian National Accounts. This will be a technically challenging task which will require specialist external assistance to fully implement. The task will be a progressive one and will take some years to complete, but the exercise should commence as soon as the new data processing facilities are installed.

(x) Data Exchange with Other Departments

The National Statistician will re-open past unsuccessful attempts to arrange motor-vehicle registration unit-record data file exchanges with the Gambian Police, where there is no legal, ethical or administrative issue preventing such exchange. Other possible exchanges will be investigated.

(xi) Reducing Costs of Nation-wide Survey Data Collection

This problem has seemed intractable in the past with reduced staff levels, but renewed efforts, involving at least partial restoration of the arrangement of dispersed CSD regional offices (pre-1995) and/or use of regional offices of other Departments, will be made, to achieve maximum productivity from the additional data collection staff made possible by the overall CSD staff increase pattern.

(xii) Reduced Reliance on Overseas Individual Staff-member Training

A more coordinated and balanced staff training programme in the CSD will be introduced, as a component of the CSD statistical expansion, with the introduction of internal staff training courses for appropriate groups within the CSD to complement individual overseas training measures.

(xiii) Simultaneous Release of Statistics to All Users and Potential Users

The past practice of selective user release of early estimates of economic indicators, and other statistics, will be replaced by universal release as a phased changeover by the CSD. In line with standard international practice, the CSD will, as soon as institutional arrangements can be made, cease the practice of preparing forecasts of the future behaviour of economic indicators, which compromise its role as an unbiased, objective preparer of such indicators.

(xiv) Improvements in the Public Relations of the CSD with the News Media, Public Users of Statistics and Suppliers of Unit-record Data in Surveys

The CSD will step up measures to improve its community profile (except in respect of the Population Census, where its record is commendable) with users and suppliers of statistics, as a means of improving survey response rates and use of official statistics in the private sector.

(xv) International Technical Assistance

The CSD will need specialist technical assistance in achieving many of the developments in subject-matter statistics and in technical statistical infrastructure, such as the integrated central register of all economic units in the country. More emphasis will be given to arranging for experts to work in the CSD, rather than sending CSD staff members to other countries to acquire expertise.

(4) USER-STAKE-HOLDER MEASURES

(xvi) The CSD will more systematically distinguish between “public good” statistics, which serve various community-wide purposes and “private good” statistics, the latter generally being of relevance to business organizations. The preparation of the former will continue to be funded by the Government, while the cost of preparing the latter should be funded by the users, with prices being set on the basis of the value to the user. The CSD will expand the preparation of “private good” statistics, facilitated by a more systematic adoption of a data base concept in the design of its data processing systems. Such expansion will generate revenue for the CSD which will reduce the net cost to the Government of preparing public-good statistics. This measure will not produce significant revenue, however, in the shorter term.

- (xvii) The Statistics Advisory Council will have the responsibility, along with the CSD, of stimulating the formation of consultative groups of users of particular subject-matter statistics, a prime example being national accounts statistics.
- (xviii) The CSD will encourage users to establish enhanced ongoing contact with the statisticians who prepare subject-matter statistics of relevance to their needs.
- (xix) Users of CSD statistics will be progressively provided with electronic means of accessing statistics, as the required technology becomes available.
- (xx) When commercial market research organisations become established in The Gambia, the CSD will facilitate their work to the extent that is legally and administratively permissible, taking into account the distinction between public-good and private-good statistical services.