

Sultanate of Oman

Directorate General of Economic statistics and the Directorate General of Social Statistics

The Sultanate has paid full attention to statistics since the 1970s, when the first government system capable of undertaking the duties of economic and social development in terms of planning and implementation was established. That was the Directorate General of National Statistics set up within the Technical Secretariat of the Development Council by Royal Decree No. 46/77 issued on June 30, 1977. The Royal decree 19/94 establishing the Ministry of Development was then issued, followed by the endorsement of its organizational structure comprising a number of general directorates, among them were the Directorate General of Economic statistics and the Directorate General of Social Statistics. The two directorates have been maintained even after the amalgamation of the Ministry of Development with Ministry of National Economy according to the Royal Decree No. 4/99, issued on January 4, 1999.

The Establishment of the Statistics Advisory Committee

The first statistical law in the Sultanate was issued in December 1988 and remained in force until April 2001 when a new law was issued by the Royal Decree No. 29/2001 dated 7 April 2001. The new law entrusted the Directorate General of Economic Statistics and the Directorate General of Social Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy with the responsibility for collection and dissemination of statistics, carrying out surveys and population censuses. The law stipulates that other government units can also conduct surveys with regard to matters falling within their domain in coordination with the relevant Directorate General. The law also gives private companies and establishments the freedom to carry out sample surveys in the areas related to the marketing of their products, conditional on obtaining a prior written approval from one of the two statistics directorates as appropriate. Article (9) of the statistical law stipulates the formulation of an Advisory committee under the chairmanship of the Secretary General of the Ministry of National Economy and membership of the following:

1. Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman
2. Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information
3. Undersecretary of the Ministry of Manpower for Labour Affairs
4. Undersecretary of the Ministry of National Economy for Development Affairs
5. Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning Affairs
6. Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education for Education Planning and Projects
7. Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery Resources
8. Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for commerce and Industry
9. Undersecretary of the Ministry of Civil Service
10. Representative from ROP
11. Representative from Sultan Qaboos University
12. Director General of Social Statistics
13. Director General of Economic Statistics

The committee assumes the responsibility of revising the regulations prepared by the Ministry in accordance with the provisions of this law before their approval by the Minister, in addition to coordinating all efforts directed toward data collection and analysis. The Committee assumes, in particular, the following responsibilities:

- a. Approval of long term socioeconomic statistics plans and the annual statistical plans prepared by the Ministry of National Economy and other government units.
- b. Coordination of statistical work and activities in the Sultanate.
- c. Determining Priority of studies, surveys and censuses according to the requirements of the different government units and in the way that meets their planning needs .
- d. Unification of statistical concepts, terminologies in the Sultanate and the follow up of the international recommendations in this regard.
- e. Determining the manner of conducting statistical processes, the technical method followed in their preparation and the publication of their results to ensure level improvement and the speedy implementation of official statistics.
- f. Revising the cost of specialized statistical operations of the different government units and sending comments to concerned authorities.
- g. Encouraging statistical studies and research in the different fields and levels and work towards spreading statistical awareness which would enable the graduation of enough number of qualified citizens to work in the field of statistics.
- h. Approving the publication of the results of official statistics which have been decided to be undertaken or collected in special or periodic bulletins except the results which the committee decides to treat them as confidential. The committee can use a number of experts and specialists according to the subjects under study.

Teams and Subcommittees of the Advisory Committee

Since its established and till now the Advisory Committee held a number of meetings, where it discussed and approved a number of memos and reports, beside drawing and approving the executive regulations of the statistical law which was issued vide Ministerial decision no. 7/2004 dated 7/2/2004. In light of these regulations a number of work teams and specialized committees were formed, in addition to taking a number of decisions and recommendations aiming at improving performance and statistical work in the Sultanate. Below is a summary of the achievements of the committee during previous periods and planned tasks for 2006.

a. Statistics Technical Committee:

The Statistics technical committee was formed by Ministerial Decision No.36/ 2004, under the chairmanship of the undersecretary of the Ministry of National Economy for development affairs and members drawn from different government units. The technical committee should assist the statistics Advisory committee to carry out tasks spelled out in paragraphs a-h of article (9) of the Statistical Law. Among these tasks is the preparation of studies and research regarding the directives and priorities of the statistical work and preparing them in the form of plans, programmes and projects, together with specifying the mechanism for their implementation and follow up and evaluation. The technical committee should also assume the responsibility of studying ways and means for building statistical capabilities of the Sultanate and proposing the convening of seminars, workshops, conferences and meetings in the areas of statistics together with studying the statistical plans, programmes and projects which are prepared by the other government units. The technical committee is also responsible for the provision of technical support for some of those statistical projects and programmes presented by ministries and government units, in accordance with their needs and in light of available resources and expertise of the ministry. The technical committee should submit its recommendations to the Statistics Advisory Committee and convene two meetings a year, provided that the two meetings are convened one month before the meeting of the Advisory Committee.

b. Committee for Developing the Indicators of Sustainable Development:

In accordance with the Ministerial Decision 121/2003, the Committee for Developing the Indicators of Sustainable Development was formed under the chairmanship of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of National Economic for Development Affairs and membership of some others. Four working teams

stemmed from this committee. These are social dimension team, economic dimension team, environment dimension team and the digital dimension team (ICT). These teams are entrusted with collecting the indicators used internally, revising their methods of computation, their source of data quality and uses. This committee has to prepare a manual for the sustainable development indicators embodying these indicators and their uses, how they are computed and the source of information required and to publish a periodic bulletin (annual) containing the values of these indicators for which data is available and disseminate it through appropriate mediums. This project aims at the provision of indicators (timely and reliable) which are prerequisite for decision taking and lay down of policies related to sustainable development in the Sultanate. The Committee and its four subcommittees have convened a series of meetings which resulted in the publication of the methodologies manual and the bulletin of sustainable development indicators. These two documents will be issued and used electronically during the last quarter of 2006.

c. Statistical Concepts, Terminologies and Classification Workteam:

The Statistics Advisory Committee formed the statistics concepts, terminologies and classifications work team vide the decision No 12/2005. The work team is headed by the Director General of Economic Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy and membership of representatives from concerned authorities. The team is entrusted with studying all classifications and concepts used in the Sultanate at present and determine their compatibility with international classifications and present the proposals for their unification in all government units. The work team held a workshop during the period 17-18/4/2004 to acquaint the staff of the different ministries with the statistics concepts, terminologies and classifications and concepts manuals were distributed to ministries and the public entities to refer to them when needs arise. The team has also prepared a number of manuals, namely, economic activities manual, nationality classification manual, and the geographic manual for governments, regions and welayats, together with the Omani manual for education qualification and vocational classification manual. The team is currently engaged in the preparation of a national manual for statistics concepts and classifications used in the Sultanate, in addition to preparation for the second workshop which is considered as an extension to the first one. It aims at training the participants on the application of statistical classifications which were embodied in the cabinet decision No. 11/2003 and any other classifications.

d. Statistics strategy preparation team:

To enable the statistics system of the Sultanate to grasp the available opportunities for development and strengthening the success achieved so far and face the challenges to move to new horizons which meet the requirement of this new era and contribute at the same time towards enhancing planning to achieve development and upgrade the efficiency of the modern state administration, require that a strategic plan is drawn. The availability of a statistics strategic plan with clear vision and objectives is considered a prerequisite for sustained statistic development work and increase its returns. For the purpose of promoting the levels of production and usage of high quality statistical data through strengthening coordination between the statistical system components, utilizing the development in statistical methodologies and information technology, using accessibility for users and improve the quality of this data, the Advisory Committee issued at its second meeting for 2003 the Decision No. 22/2004 stipulating the preparation of the statistics strategy. A team was formed and entrusted with the preparation of the statistic strategy (2006 – 2020) vide Ministerial Decision No. 414/2004, headed by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of National Economy for Development Affairs and membership of others from the Ministry of National Economy. The team held a series of meetings which resulted in laying down the main framework of the elements and components of the statistics strategy and coordinated with concerned ministries to formulate statistics strategy for their respective sectors. The team then carried out the task of integrating and coordinating these sectors strategies into a comprehensive strategy and dividing it into two phases which were then approved by the statistics Advisory Committee at its second meeting for 2005. The concerned authorities have been addressed and urged to implement phase one of the strategy which embodies the projects which concerned authorities want them to be implemented within the first executive plan 2006- 2010.

e. Work team supervisory committee for the development of the central database and statistical information:

The central information studies and statistical research database is considered one of the main pillars of the statistics system and its important tool on which it depends in providing its services and products for the different users. On the basis of this the building of database depends on a vision stemming from the vision of the statistics system of the Sultanate. Accordingly, the statistics Advisory Committee approved, at its first meeting for 2004, the recommendations of the statistics technical committee about the establishment of the central database with the following objectives:

1. Develop a central informatics wealth of the statistics data of the Sultanate (data warehouse)
2. Develop comprehensive archives for statistical reports, studies and research prepared about the Sultanate.
3. Strengthen ties and mutual relations with the information and data base at the national, regional and international levels.
4. Dissemination of central comprehensive database in store and make it more accessible for users.

In accordance with its decision taken at its first meeting for 2004, the statistics Advisory Committee worked towards establishing a central database comprising information, studies, statistical research, with the importance of keeping the statistics technical committee constantly informed about the progress of the work. A work team has been formed to follow up the development of the central database in addition to a committee drawn from different government units to supervise the development of the database. The team held a series of meetings and the services of an expert from ESCWA was resorted to assist in arriving at the requirements of the project and concepts and applications related to it. Work is also underway at present for convening a regional workshop in corporation with ESCWA about the central database envisaged to be held during the last quarter of 2006. The workshop is expected to come up with a comprehensive draft text for the project. It is also expected that some of the participating countries have successful experiences in this area which can be shared with them. Other participating countries which are aspiring to establish their own central database would also benefit from this workshop by acquainting themselves with the experiences of the Sultanate and other states in this regard.

Statistical Surveys and Studies

Since its establishment, the Statistics Advisory Committee has been striving to coordinate between the different authorities in the Sultanate which carry out surveys, statistical studies, for the prime purpose of unifying efforts directed towards the provision of data, concepts, terminologies in addition to decreasing the burden on respondents. The committee designed special forms for this purpose in particular, to be sent to all miniseries and other government units to be filled in with information about surveys and studies planned to be undertaken. The completed forms have to be returned to the committee at least two months before the date on which the survey/study would commence. The plans will be discussed at the committee's second biannual meeting. In this regard the committee is currently engaged in electronically collecting surveys and statistical studies planned to be undertaken by ministries and government units which will be conducted in 2007.

The objectives of the Statistics Advisory Committee from this procedure are as follows:

1. Coordination between the units of the statistical system which have plans to conduct surveys and statistical studies. It is an obligatory procedure for decentralized statistics system aiming at minimizing the efforts, the optimum use of resources, achieving integration between statistical products of the different units, and reducing the burden on data providers.
2. Verification of the methodologies proposed to be followed in carrying out surveys, statistical studies and adequacy of resources devoted for their implementation. This procedure is important for the purpose of ascertaining that the resultant data and information comply with the quality standards set out by the Advisory Committee.
3. Acquaintance with the statistical data and information made available by the different units in the Sultanate determine the deficiency in data and to lay down a strategy for bridging this gap thus ensuring the provision of data and information for planning and policy formulation.

Statistics Capacity Building (training & education)

a. Training Courses:

The formulation of plans and their evaluation and follow up require different statistical skills which include the provision of data required by these plans at the right time, the skills for the management and processing of data and the derivation of some indicators needed for both planning and evaluation. The list expands to include statistical analysis and making inference about the characteristics of the communities studied and explaining of results. The computers and software in this information revolution era have made the task of data collection, data management and computation of indicators an easy job. The role computer plays, however, will remain confined to these processes without traversing this stage to improve statistical methods unless attention is directed to building, statistical capabilities of the people concerned and upgrading their skills by intensive training and theoretical studies. In its endeavour to achieve this the Advisory Committee issued at its first meeting for 2003 the decision No. 6/2003 regarding the investigation about training requirements of the different ministries and government units in the area of statistics. The investigation was carried through the following:

1. Undertake an annual counting of employees at the different government ministries and units who perform statistical activities to determine their numbers, qualifications, nationalities, experiences in statistics and the statistical tasks entrusted to them.
2. Undertake a periodical (annually) survey of the training requirements for the employees in ministries and governments units in statistics which will facilitate the selection of the training programs by the Advisory Committee.
3. Prepare and publish a training manual of the training courses which will be held domestically. The manual should include the objectives of the courses; topics to be covered, targeted entities, dates and a commitment on the part of all concerned to implement those courses

b. Diploma of Statistics Program:

In its endeavour to provide a qualified cadre in statistics and upgrade the skills of secondary school graduates working in the area of statistics, improve their experiences and assist them to acquire theoretical and empirical statistical methods, the Statistics Advisory Committee adopted at its first meeting for 2006, the diploma programme in statistics. The programme has been entrusted to Sultan Qaboos University in the framework of the cooperation between the Statistics Advisory Committee and the University. The programme will be implemented during the academic year 2006/2007.