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**Workshop on the Implementation of a National Quality Assurance Framework for Official Statistics in countries of the Africa Region**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 14-18 October 2019

**Report (final)**

(December 2019)

**I. Organization, purpose and participants**

1. At its fiftieth session in March 2019 the Statistical Commission adopted the United Nations National Quality Assurance Frameworks Manual for Official Statistics (Manual) and the recommendations contained therein (decision 50/106). The Manual was developed by the Expert Group on National Quality Assurance Frameworks (EG-NQAF). The Statistical Commission welcomed the Manual as an important contribution in guiding countries in the implementation of a national quality assurance framework, including for new data sources, new data providers, and for data and statistics of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators. The Manual provides guidance for developing and implementing a national quality assurance framework (NQAF) and aims at addressing quality assurance in different circumstances and situations, hereby supporting countries in safeguarding the role of official statistics as trusted source of information in a changing environment. In its decision, the Statistical Commission took note of the results of a country survey on the implementation of national quality assurance frameworks and the fact that many countries have yet to implement a national quality assurance framework.

2. Within this overall context, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) in cooperation with the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA) and the United Nations Economic Commission of Africa/African Center for Statistics (UNECA/ACS) organized this workshop on the Implementation of a National Quality Assurance Framework for Official Statistics in countries of the Africa Region, which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 14-18 May 2018. The Workshop aimed at training participants from national statistical offices (NSOs) on quality assurance and the development of a national quality assurance framework and its implementation throughout the national statistical system (NSS).

3. A total of 23 participants from the following 16 developing countries took part in the workshop: Botswana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In addition, one participant of the United Nations Economic Commission of Africa/African Center for Statistics (UNECA/ACS) and of the East African Community attended the workshop.

## **II. Summary**

4. Opening remarks were delivered by Leandre Foster Ngogang Wandji on behalf of Mr. Oliver Chinganya, Director of the Statistics Division of the United Nations Economic Commission of Africa and Director of the African Center for Statistics (UNECA/ACS) and Mr. Matthias Reister, Chief of the Development Data Section, United Nations Statistics Division on behalf of UNSD.

5. The workshop introduced the contents of the Manual on National Quality Assurance Frameworks for Official Statistics and shared national practices. Specifically, the workshop reviewed the regional and global perspectives regarding the status of work on quality assurance, reviewed the contents of the UN NQAF Manual (session 1) and discussed the status of implementation of quality assurance and national quality assurance frameworks in participating countries (session 2). The meeting reviewed the United Nations National Quality Assurance Framework and also the African Charter of Statistics (UNECA/ACS) (session 3). Subsequently, the meeting discussed the development of a NQAF and the use of assessment tools (session 4). The implementation of a national quality assurance framework at the NSO and throughout the NSS were discussed in session 5 and session 6. Furthermore, the meeting discussed quality assurance in the case of different data sources (session 7) and the certification of statistical outputs and producers of statistics (session 8). In its last session (session 9) the meeting discussed plans and next steps of countries, issues to be addressed and regional and international activities.

6. The workshop concluded with closing remarks by UNECA/ACS and UNSD thanking participants for their contributions and active participation, and vowing to continue the joint efforts to improve the quality of official statistics.

## **III. Conclusions**

### **Session 2: Status of NQAF implementation in countries**

1. The workshop:
  - a. took note that several participating countries do not have a NQAF and that in several additional countries it is not yet approved/formalized;
  - b. noted that countries have staff working on data quality and conduct quality assurance activities but that there is generally a lack of resources/staff; in addition, lack of commitment, lack of tools and challenges in coordination hamper efforts;

- c. noted on the positive side, that countries have statistical acts and an NSDS in place which provides a basis for quality assurance activities;
- d. took note that multiple participating countries have very significantly strengthened their efforts on quality assurance recently, triggered by institutional reform such as a new statistics act or visible quality problems, and often with the support of partners.

### **Session 3: The UN Quality Assurance Framework**

- 2. The workshop:
  - a. noted that professional independence is crucial for the credibility of official statistics but that it can be more challenging to assert for the few participating countries where the NSO is not autonomous;
  - b. noted that generally all quality principles apply to surveys and all other data sources;
  - c. noted that the self-assessment conducted as group discussion revealed challenges in the access to data maintained by private corporations (requirement 2.6), risk analysis (requirement 8.8), use of administrative and other data sources (requirements 10.3, 11.5 and 12.3), metadata management (requirement 12.5) and the reflection of user needs (requirements 14.2, 14.3 and 14.3);
  - d. noted that individual responses to the self-assessment questionnaire submitted by participating countries ahead of the workshop identified “Assuring quality commitment” (Principle 9) and “Managing metadata” as most in need for improvement (Principle 19);
  - e. noted that the initial completion of the self-assessment questionnaire as part of this workshop served to familiarize participants with the UN NQAF but at the same time created a reference point for later evaluations;
  - f. noted that countries may resubmit their self-assessment questionnaire to UNSD confidentially; however, at this time there is no mechanism in place to systematically analyse the results of the self-assessment and NQAF implementation of countries based on the self-assessment; the EG-NQAF considers developing a mechanism to engage countries to NQAF implementation and may utilize the self-assessment checklist in its efforts;
  - g. noted that the mentioned “piloting” of the self-assessment checklist refers to the testing of the checklist and its instructions and not to a pilot exercise of “implementing” the questionnaire across countries; it is entirely up to countries when and how to use the checklist;
  - h. noted that proper conduct of the self-assessment requires the involvement of a larger team of staff, also to mitigate the risk of subjectivity inherent to any self-assessment.

#### **Session 4: NQAF development and assessment tools**

3. The workshop:
  - a. took note that based on the examples provided countries may take somewhat different routes to the development of their NQAF, mostly reflecting different institutional arrangements and approaches regarding the involvement of stakeholders;
  - b. took note that while the “drafting” of a NQAF may require only a few months, consultation processes and testing/piloting may stretch the time for development and adoption of a NQAF into several years, constituting a first phase of the implementation process;
  - c. took note that in the examples provided by participating countries the NQAF was developed for the entire NSS and that one challenge was being seen as “quality police” which can be addressed with an appropriate socialization and communication process;
  - d. noted that data quality is to be considered part of the NSDS process;
  - e. took note that attaching a “label” requires compliance with a standard while typically certification entails a specific elaborate process which includes documentation, quality reports, self-assessment and audit (see UN NQAF, paras. 4.21 and 4.22);
  - f. noted that quality assessment deliver insights into strengths and weaknesses and should result in concrete recommendations; noted that user satisfaction surveys should be seen as part of a user engagement strategy;
  - g. took note of Chapter 4 of the *Manual* which covers assessment tools and Section 5.B which describes steps of NQAF development.

#### **Session 5: Implementation of NQAF at the NSO**

4. The workshop:
  - a. took note of the importance of appropriate institutional arrangements and legal framework for the implementation of quality assurance at the NSO;
  - b. took note that quality assurance must be explained as being of benefit to overcome the lack of commitment and even resistance;
  - c. took note that the IMF’s DQAF is geared towards macroeconomic statistics offering a rigorous assessment and should be seen as complementary to a generic NQAF for the entire NSO/NSS;
  - d. took note that the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) is an instrument to document, assess and improve statistical processes, and also supports the identification of quality indicators; it is increasingly used by NSOs;

- e. Took note of Section 5.C of the *Manual* which describes possible steps of NQAF implementation and the efforts of the EG-NQAF to develop a roadmap for NQAF implementation and a checklist for self-evaluation to support implementation of a NQAF.

## **Session 6: Implementation of NQAF throughout the NSS**

5. The workshop:
  - a. noted the importance of promoting a quality culture and took note of a demand-driven approach to the implementation throughout the NSS;
  - b. noted the phased approach of NQAF implementation for ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) in the country examples that were provided, starting with a preliminary investigation or problem identification as phase 1; noted the use of various tools in each phase;
  - c. noted that the provision of support to MDAs takes time and resources, which are limited, but that also having the adequate mandate is very important;
  - d. noted that given the resource constraints more training should be provided to create capacity for self-assessment and quality assurance at the MDAs.
  - e. noted that metadata management (use of a metadata template) and a “light” self-assessment are good tools to support MDA’s in the quality assurance of SDG indicators;
  - f. took note that the sheer number of SDG indicators, access to data and coordination are particular challenges for the quality assurance of SDG indicators;
  - g. took note of Chapters 6 and 8 of the *Manual* discussing implantation of quality assurance throughout the NSO and for SDG data and statistics, respectively.

## **Session 7: Quality assurance for different data sources**

6. The workshop:
  - a. noted, based on the country examples provided, the importance of methodological soundness (Principle 10) and appropriate statistical procedures (Principle 12) and respective practices for assuring the quality (in particular the accuracy) of statistics produced from statistical data sources such as surveys and censuses;
  - b. noted that generally all quality principles are relevant for statistical data sources and noted the importance of cost-effectiveness (Principle 11) and coordination (Principle 1) - please see the *Manual*, Table 7.1: Examples of some specific elements to be assured when different sources of data are used;
  - c. noted that countries use administrative data sources and some selected other data sources such as geospatial information but that most countries do not have concrete strategies yet for systematically increasing the use of “new” / administrative and other data sources in the production of official statistics;

- d. took note countries are planning to use their NQAF for the quality assurance of statistics of new data sources but that there is generally no special strategy for dealing with these new data sources;
- e. noted that establishing partnerships with new data providers is one possible response to the challenges posed by the arrival of a new data ecosystem;
- f. took note of Chapter 7 of the *Manual* which defines different data sources, identifies their advantages and respective quality challenges and provides a table with specific elements to be assured when different data sources are used.

## **Session 8: Certification**

- 7. The workshop:
  - a. noted the great interest of the country example of certification;
  - b. noted, that the certification process described in the country example provided is elaborate and time-intensive taking on average 6 months to complete (only two outputs per year are being certified by the unit dedicated to this task) and that only a small number of outputs have been certified;
  - c. noted in respect to the country example presented, that entire statistical outputs/ data collections such as a survey are being certified (and not individual indicators that result from the survey); however, as part of the certification process key indicators are being reviewed which could also include the examination of any discrepancies with data from a different data source;
  - d. noted that there were numerous questions regarding the process of certification in the example presented, indicating the great interest of participating countries;
  - e. noted that, with a few exceptions participating countries do you have a similar practice to certification, but that the designation of statistics as being “official”, which is a common practice, entails fulfilling a set of requirements;
  - f. noted that certification requires significant efforts including documentation, quality reports, quality indicators, self-assessments and audits and that the designation of statistics as being “official” is no equivalent to certification, unless the label “official” would only be given if a certification process is being completed; hence, certification is typically in addition to being “official” statistics;
  - g. noted that several participating countries expect to consider to certify (i) statistical outputs and (ii) other members of the NSS in the near future but that some other countries were less sure;
  - h. noted that countries would like to apply certification to outputs throughout the NSS and different sectors, and even to statistical agencies; the objectives of certification would be to improve the quality of the data and to increase trust and credibility in official statistics but also to incentivise and motivate statistics producers;

- i. noted that the main obstacles to certification are the lack of human and financial resources, the lack of capacity /a dedicated unit and lack of tools; furthermore, the lack of a legal mandate and lack of willingness or readiness to be certified are expected major challenges as well;
- j. noted that the issue of certification requires further examination of existing practices and that the EG-NQAF has committed itself to work on this issue, possibly providing guidelines and inventory of good practices.

### **Session 9: Roadmap of countries and support**

#### 8. The workshop:

- a. noted that the plans and next steps of countries for quality assurance focus on (i) strengthening the legal framework, (ii) the establishment of a NQAF, (iii) the conduct of an array of quality assurance activities, in particular implementing quality assurance throughout the NSS by working with MDAs, (iv) strengthening coordination and (v) the use of new data sources.
- b. noted that issues to be addressed / further support of countries should focus especially on (i) the use of administrative and new data sources, including “big data”, (ii) follow-up with countries on progress, and (iii) technical assistance; furthermore, evaluation of compliance at the detailed level, quality assurance for indicators, metadata, and assessment tools were mentioned as well by one or several countries as being in special need to be addressed;
- c. noted that the EG-NQAF has developed a work program which includes promoting the *Manual*, the finalization of the self-assessment checklist, the provision of a roadmap for NQAF implementation, e-learning, and on improved data quality website and the establishment of an ongoing engagement/follow-up mechanism with countries to support the implementation of UN NQAF;
- d. noted that as it concerns technical assistance on quality assurance that needs must be communicated and expressed; in the absence of a dedicated support program on quality assurance, support for quality assurance may be provided as part of other programmes and activities as feasible and requested by countries;
- e. noted that there should be an evaluation of progress in the implementation of quality assurance in countries and that the meeting of the African Statistical Commission in October 2020 would provide an opportunity to inform on the progress.

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