

Statistical Capacity Building in Iraq

Mahdi Al-Alak

Central Statistical Organization, IRAQ,

E-mail: alalak_mm@yahoo.com

Abstract

The Central Statistical Organization of Iraq (CSO) has prepared the “National Strategy for the Development of Statistics, NSDS”.

It did so by conducting a thorough review of literature on national statistical work and system, all the while paying special attention to adopting the recommendations of the Paris 21 forum. A national task force was assigned the task of preparing a national document to serve as a guideline for the CSO work, processes, management and technical plans. In addition, development horizons were created by establishing a national strategy for the development of Statistics and a five-year plan for the years 2010-2014.

On the other side, the Republic of Iraq is in the process of implementing the second phase of the Iraq Statistical Modernization Project (ISMP) as an important part of the Programmes on Public Sector Modernization, which is being supported by the United Nations System under the leadership of UNDP.

This paper presents the main features of the statistical capacity building programmes of the NSDS and ISMP.

Keywords: statistical strategy, generic statistical business process model.

1. Features of Statistical Strategy Building

a. Vision

It specifies the ultimate goal we wish to accomplish. It also works to create a clear and binding picture so as to attain the desired future which would be a qualitative leap with respect to what we desire, what we want to go over 5-10 years. The vision we establish within the strategic plan in Iraq to achieve:

An efficient and effective national statistics system that meets all needs in accordance with national, regional and international standards and practices.

b. Primary Task (Message)

The fundamental task of the national strategy for developments of statistics in Iraq to:

Produce national statistics using the United Nation’s fundamental principles in a manner that works with the current reality in Iraq achieve a system comparable to the statistics systems of countries advanced in the field of statistics produced are credible and capable of keeping up with state-of-art national statistical work methods that comply with national, regional and international standards.

The fundamental task (or message) is to answer the following question:

What will we do? How will we do it? To answer these questions, the following attributes must be provided:

- Comprehensive coverage of the national statistics system.
- Use of a partnership approach that urges participation by all parties concerned.
- Consideration of what is present and its adaption in a manner that suits the actual situation.
- Monitoring of economic, social and political changes at the domestic level.
- Monitoring of the rapid changes in the areas of information and statistical comparisons at the regional and international levels.
- Adoption of phased approach to generally simplify complex situation.

c. Primary Objectives

First: Fulfilling the Need for Data.

Second: Building Statistical and Organizational Capacity.

Third: Enhancing Manpower Quantitatively and Qualitatively as well as Attracting Holders of Bachelor's and Graduate Degrees in Statistics.

Fourth: Developing a Methodology and Implementing Data Quality Standards.

Fifth: Developing Information Technology.

- Developing the Computer Operations Department.
- Developing the System and Programs Department.
- Developing the Database Management Department.
- Developing the Electronic Dissemination (Internet) Department.
- Developing the Geographic Information Systems Department.
- Developing the Engineering System Department.

Sixth: Information Technology Systems.

- A. Developing Data Entry Methods
- B. Developing Data Storage and Retrieval Methods

Seventh: Developing Statistics Departments within the Provinces and Decentralizing Statistical Work.

Eighth: Developing Infrastructures and Facilities in statistics Department within the Provinces and their Department

Ninth: Developing Field Methods

Tenth: Developing statistics in Ministries and Non-Ministerial State Agencies

- a. Developing the principle of partnership among the statistics department in ministries and State agencies;
- b. Enhancing the Principle of Decentralization within State Agencies;

- c. Improving and Enhancing the status of Government Statistics in Ministries and State Agencies;
- d. Statistical Coordination and Complementarity; and

Eleventh: Developing the Activity of Recording Economic Activities and the private Sector (Statistical Number).

2. The Five – Year Plan Pursuant to 2011-2015 Strategic Objectives

In order to translate the development comprehensive objectives of this strategy, a five-year plan is being adopted for the period 2011-2015. It is consistent with the vision upon which the strategic objective were established. The five- year plan is modern and keeps up with the development taking place in the field of statistical work. It applies modern approaches and standards, and follows the new trends statistical operations.

The plan took in consideration the following criteria.

- a. To realize the vision of the national strategy for statistics, data production must occur consistent with the data quality framework standards which consist of (accuracy, objectivity, methodological, soundness, reliability, relevance, timely issuance of outputs and reports, integrity, transparency, as well as data that can be compared, coordinated and reconciled with data issued by other sources).

Data needs must be studied. Gaps must be identified in preparation for listing, adding and addressing them in the five- year plan so as to bridge the gaps in currently available data. This must be done in a manner that meets user needs and ensures the inclusion of all units.
- b. The relationship between statistics users and producers must be mutual, based upon the Principle of reciprocity, where the user is supplied with statistics and in turn makes observations and suggestions which lead to the development of statistics.
- c. The implementation of the plan required the development of programs and use of modern technology in the preparation of required statistics.
- d. The five-year plan should ensure alignment of actions in ministries and other entities with the statistics plan, and to avoid repetition of actions executed by the aforementioned authorities.
- e. It must be characterized by flexibility and be changeable based on the requirements of statistical work.
- f. The implementation plan is of no use benefit if it is not periodically published and distributed to beneficiaries, researchers and the public in a manner appropriate to the importance of the statistics.

The national strategy for statistics can be used to establish a list of proposed statistical works and surveys guidance to realizing the principle national strategic statistical goals and subsidiary goals pursuant to the main principals of statistical (For details see).

3. Statistical Modernization Project

The main objective of the mission is to support the Iraqi National Statistical System (NSS) in its efforts to improve the quality and usefulness of its publications in order to better meet the needs of most users from within and outside of Government.

- a. Assessment of CSO's dissemination and proposals for improvement

The publication system of the CSO is on a good way and one can expect that in a few years statistical results will be available for everybody in an adequate form. However it should not be hidden that the co-operation with important data sources is not yet functioning well: in most publications/reports statistical results from the three Kurdish provinces are missing because of delayed delivery.

Another point for improvement is the adaptation of the presentation of statistical numbers to international standards.

In view of the implementation of the new organisational structure of the CSO it is recommended to adopt capacity building programmes with the following contents:

- Types of users and their needs (basic, standard and user specific products);
- Carrying out a user satisfactory survey;
- Public relations, marketing;
- Pricing of publications and international pricing policy;
- International dissemination standards;

For all technical departments who produce statistical reports/publications, training courses should be held on how to produce statistical publications according to international standards with the following contents:

- General presentation rules (structure of a publication, standard page format, page numbering, heading, text presentation and typeface);
- Presentation techniques (selection of user-relevant tables, numerical data in tables, abbreviations, documenting the table content, basic rules for creating graphics, types of charts);
- Writing explanatory comments and quality reviews; and
- Lay outing publications (presentation of text, inserting Access and Excel tables and graphics in Word).

It is also recommended to provide assistance in the establishment of the central library. Right from the beginning all books and other resources should be indexed using a modern electronic library system. Assistance would be needed in the selection of adequate library software and applied methods of indexing.

b. Towards a Generic Statistical Business Process Model, "GSBPM"

The CSO should confirm formally its intention to continue to prepare for the adoption of the GSBPM and to align its processes, quality management and metadata management to that international standard. This confirmation needs to be backed up by a proper announcement emphasizing the full support of top management. It also needs to be backed up by active support and proper actions and activities of top management and all directors.

It is recommended that the CSO establishes a steering committee for planning and overseeing training, the conduct of the pilots or case studies on implementing the business process model and for overseeing the analysis of the case studies.

It is recommended that the CSO carries out a number of case studies. The cases should involve both surveys or processes carried out within a single department and processes cutting across two or more departments. The cases should not be confined to sample surveys but cover various other processes such as statistical production based on data from ministries and on administrative records or administrative registers.

The case studies should focus on the feasibility of aligning existing processes to the GSBPM and enhancing efficiency through standardization (of processes, applications, methods, templates etc.), re-use (of design, applications, software etc.), quality (through evaluation and improvement), and on the writing and management of metadata.

These case studies should have the dual purpose of testing the alignment of current CSO processes to those of the model and identifying areas/points for improvement actions to be undertaken by the statistical teams involved.

The conduct and the observations made during the case studies should be well documented, preferably in a standardized manner, in order to form a basis for analysis and evaluation.

It is recommended that the CSO invites statistical departments of ministries to participate in the training and follow the case studies. At a later stage, the CSO may offer the statistical departments to assist them with conducting case studies in their own subjects or surveys.

In order to ensure a coherent and continuous work flow, it is recommended that the steering group draws up a work plan and a time schedule for the training and the case studies or pilots. Furthermore, it is recommended that these activities are started up without delay and that the case studies have been carried out or be at least well underway at the time of the next visit by the expert (October 2013). He could then, together with CSO colleagues, participate in the analysis of the case studies and planning for the next steps in adopting the GSBPM at the CSO.

C. Improving the production and data delivery

The unsatisfying situation of data provision by some ministries and other state agencies is first of all a problem of missing co-operation. The CSO is trying to improve the situation by proposing a supreme council for national statistics, which should increase the awareness of the importance of official statistics in the political decision making and thus the importance of the statistical departments within the ministries and state agencies.

Another significant way for improving the co-operation with statistical departments of ministries and other state agencies is the provision of training. The following training courses would be of great benefit:

- General training in working with statistics (methods of data collection, coding and processing) and
- Special training in the application of specific nomenclatures/classifications.

d. Gender Statistics

The Gender Statistics Unit was established in the CSO in 2007. It has been established in cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

With women in Iraq resuming their full participation in the political, economic and social life of the Iraqi society, the advancement of the role of women in the society has become a major topic. This role calls for enhancing the status of women and advancing their skills and capabilities to enable them to fully participate in the country's development process. It also calls for empowerment women to play an active role and make an effective contribution to the community's welfare and wellbeing especially in the rural area where this contribution is most needed.

The development process in Iraq has made gender equality in all fields one of its salient objectives. It considers women's contribution to the development as a stepping stone for achieving sustainable development. For this reason the CSO accords special attention to the development and dissemination of gender statistics in order to identify various gender gaps and their possible impact on the development process. The main

Function of the Unit are to

- Collect gender data and develop gender indicators from the national statistical system, and assess and analyze such data and indicators;
- Monitor the progress achieved in making available gender data;
- Mainstream gender perspective in statistical operations of the national statistical system.

References

1. Central Statistical Organization, IRAQ (2010) "National Strategy for the Development of Statistics, 2011-2015.
2. Working papers of Iraq Statistical Modernization Project (ISMP), Public Sector Modernization, Supported by the United Nations System under the leadership of UNDP.