

Challenges Facing Official Statistics in Egypt

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Abstract

The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) has been mainly focusing on the advancement of official statistics. Proper decision making can not be realized in the absence of reliable and timely produced official statistics. This paper presents the current situation of statistics in Egypt and outlines the main challenges facing CAPMAS in producing .integrated, relevant, reliable and timely official statistics which fulfill the demands, increasing needs and expectations of stakeholders and users particularly micro level data and relevant indicators. It suggests potential solutions for improving production and use of statistics to sustain progress in the future. Finally recommendations for the way forward are presented.

Key words: CAPMAS, decision making, financial support, national strategy.

First: Introduction

CAPMAS is a governmental organization in charge of producing official statistics (demographic, social economic and environment) and implementing statistical surveys, in addition to population and economic censuses, which provide data that illustrates a comprehensive view of all aspects of life in the country.

Statistics characterized by accuracy and timeliness is considered one of the main tools for any government looking forward to make properly decisions, improve its performance, monitoring the socioeconomic advancements and measuring the progress that achieved to reach the targets.

Since the establishment of CAPMAS, it has been keen on implementing the given tasks according to parallel plans relevant with the users needs. However, there are some challenges that negatively affect the ability to implement these tasks and perform them in the best way.

This paper presents the current situation of Egypt and outlines the main challenges facing CAPMAS in producing integrated, relevant, reliable and timely official statistics which fulfill the demands, increasing needs and expectations of stakeholders and users particularly micro level data and relevant indicators. It suggests potential solutions for improving production and use of statistics to sustain progress in the future. Finally recommendations for the way forward are presented.

Second: National Statistical Office Role

The official statistical system is established on a legal and academic basis which regulates the process of collecting data and ensuring its availability to meet the different and renewed needs of users according to the best international statistical standards and practices. CAPMAS plays an important role to develop and activate the national official statistics through supporting real partnership demand as following:

1. Carrying out census, statistics and studies that are needed by the different country sectors to show the characteristics and the changes that represent the variations among different areas, regions, and groups in the country.
2. Coordination and technical support to national statistical units in different ministries and government institutions in Egypt to achieve its duties of providing the required relevant and reliable data for preparing bulletins and statistical indicators.
3. Collecting and disseminating data according to a specific time table with the best international statistical standards, and making it available for all the users.
4. Providing adequate statistical information and data that is required by the country's organizations, universities, research centers. the investors and business men.
5. Supporting and strengthening the cooperation with both regional and international organizations; and the corresponding statistical offices.
6. Working continuously to increase the statistical awareness to all society groups.

Third: The Current Situation of Statistics in Egypt

1. CAPMAS follows the cabinet, and works according to general statistics law

- number 35 (1960), upgraded by law number 28 (1982) and the Egyptian president decree number 2195 (1964). CAPMAS has regional offices in all governorates of Egypt.
2. CAPMAS applies the international concepts and standards that regulate statistical work according to the **Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics UNSD 1994**.
 3. CAPMAS releases different statistical products that includes; economic and demographic statistics, which are released regularly (annually, biannually, quarterly, and monthly). In addition to the studies and surveys (**ad hoc**).
 4. CAPMAS is using modern technology such as geographical information systems and recent methods in collecting, storing, analyzing and disseminating data .Moreover; it updates regularly and provides the media with new releases and holding seminars for data users to follow up the release of the results of the most important surveys such as income, expenditure and consumption and, labor force etc.
 5. CAPMAS is working on the production of high quality data by:
 - a. Supporting the role of its regional offices in collecting data and processing of these data.
 - b. Applying the international statistical standards in the production and usage of data with high quality, reliability and commitment to Supporting the role of its regional offices in governorates in professionalism in all stages according to the announced regular time table matching with the special data dissemination system (SDDS).
 - c. Following up on the suitable mechanism to make general statistics and data available for users at a convenient time, by different methods ensuring keeping the principle of the privacy of the individual data.
 - d. Developing the documentation mechanism of the statistical methodologies, archiving it and disseminating it on the website of CAPMAS to facilitate its use in the future.
 - e. Improving the capacities and the competencies of the employees in the statistical units in both private and public sector through statistical training programs regulated by CAPMAS periodically
 6. When planning to conduct the census, surveys, current statistics etc, CAPMAS coordinates and consults with concerned authorities like research centers, academic and professional and international organizations etc, taking in consideration that it is working on achieving the harmonization between the users' needs and the response of the interviewers and the importance of required statistics at the national level.
 7. CAPMAS Support and strengthen the cooperation with the regional international organizations and the corresponding statistical offices. The latest years have observed a great openness with international organizations like IMF, World Bank, and regional organizations such as ESCAWA, COMESA, African Economical Committee (ECA), African Development Bank (AFD) to develop and improve official statistics and make it harmonized and compatible on the regional and international level like shared programs, exchange of data and information, support the statistical capacity building of CAPMAS, technical support, in addition to cooperation with several corresponding statistical offices on the Arabic/African level and twinning programs with prestigious statistical organization (ex: twinning program with (Denmark Statistical Office).
 8. CAPMAS is developing the statistical capacity of its employees in statistics and IT field by regional and international training programs, study visits and by motivating them to continue their graduate study in

statistics in different colleges and institutes whether inside or outside the country, in addition, it consults with distinguished professionals in the field of statistics to work in it .

Fourth: The Challenges Facing Producing Official Statistics

CAPMAS is facing several challenges which restrict its ability to carry out its role as planned and affects the availability of suitable statistics in the aspects of quantity, type, and accuracy and its relevance. These challenges include:

1. There is inadequate and insufficient financial support, as the financial capabilities form an obstacle toward its development and it limits the capability of carrying out the ambitious statistical programs as it requires continuous development and provision of adequate financial funds to promote the capacity of human resources and the usage of various methods of new technology in statistical data collection, processing, analysis, and dissemination.
2. The lack of sufficient competencies and statistical staff needed to carry out the best practices in the technical aspect. Moreover, the inability of CAPMAS to attract technical experts and keep the distinguished ones due to weakness in financial incentives. As the employment policy in the administrative body of the government during the previous period led to a rise in the average age of the employees in CAPMAS and an imbalance in staff structure that benefited the higher level employees at the expense of the lower level employees. As the current trend of the usage of youth that are freshly graduated to work at CAPMAS as temporary contracts has contributed to the decrease the sharp imbalance in the staff structure but has created problems of a different type relating to how to keep these employees with temporary contracts despite the weak moral and financial incentives, and the absence of steady work. That is reflected negatively in some situations on the quality of the statistical process.
3. The absence of a National Strategy for The Development of Statistics in Egypt (NSDS) which determines fundamentally the role of the principle work of partners in the statistical operations to achieve the integration in the national official statistical system.
4. Defects in the statistical legislation as it became clear that the current statistical laws are no longer matching the changes of the time period in relation to the statistical field. So new and advanced statistical legislation needs to be put to enable CAPMAS to fulfill its role as a national system and regulates the relations between the sides of the statistical systems in the recent and clear legal frame.
5. In some situations, we notice insufficient enthusiasm from the decision makers in:
 - Depending on official statistics in policy making and sets the developing plans for the country.
 - The lack of awareness of the importance of statistics and not realizing that statistics is considered a fortune and is important as the available natural resources.
6. The lack of the society's awareness of the importance of statistics, which lead to a shortage and the deficiency of the required statistics and information as a result of the citizen's refusal to provide their data. Moreover, there is no co-operation between some of the country's systems with CAPMAS whether it is completely or partially.

7. The limitation of the dependence of some country's agencies on the administrative registers in the production of harmonized and comparable data and statistics.
8. The absence of the link between the available data bases in some country agencies. Furthermore, others don't have any data bases at all.
9. The absence of any mechanisms that ensures continuous communication between the data users and producers of the statistical data. This will be taken in consideration in the case of building a national strategy for developing a statistics in Egypt (NSDS).

Fifth: Suggested Solutions to Overcome the Challenges:

1. Establishment of a supreme council for statistics to put a general frame, to specify the priorities and direct the statistical program according to the national requirements and follow up the coordination among the elements of the statistical system and specifying their roles on the best way.
2. The preparation of a national strategy that includes upgrading and sustaining the statistical system, improving the quantity and quality of the statistical data, developing the statistical capability, increasing the statistical awareness and support knowledge and developing the dissemination methods taking in consideration the requested financial budget to implement these activities.
3. The preparation of law to regulate statistical work to suit technical and technological developments applied in this field, including that:
 - CAPMAS is the main source which produces, analyzes, disseminates, and stores statistical data in all fields (demographically, geographically, economically etc).
 - Forcing all ministries and the official systems and citizens to offer all necessary facilities to CAPMAS to obtain the statistical data without any obstacles.
 - Ensuring the role of CAPMAS' as a coordinator for the national statistical system
4. Activate all legislations to increase CAPMAS' capability in obtaining the necessary data for producing the required statistical data.
5. The development of strategies of developing human resources at CAPMAS, ministries and different organizations by Specifying adequate resources for statistical training centers to include both practical and academic skills training programs that support data production and meets the requirements of information market.
6. Studying increasing the country investments for statistics and looking for new resources either from the private sector or the national and international organizations to support current resources of fund.
7. Supporting the relationships with the data users whether from the government or the private sector, in order to meet their increasing needs of statistical data, and discuss with them when planning statistical programs to specify the priorities reflect their actual needs of data
8. Supporting the relationship between practical and academic statistics. This occurs through:
 - Making changes in the statistics curriculum in different universities to match with the requirements of official statistics.
 - Moreover, joining the statistical professors in the advisor committee for the different statistical projects.

Sixth: The Recommendations

If the planning is a transition from the current situation to the desired situation, during a definite time period, so the statistical information is considered the fundamental factor, not only during the stage of planning, but also in the following up and evaluation. From this aspect, the high quality statistical information is very important until this plan achieves its goals with the least possible cost.

1. The development of the countries is measured by the progress of its official statistics. On the other hand, the development of countries cannot be achieved in the absence of a comprehensive, objective and targeted statistical embodiment, Therefore, we must break this purposeless chain by coordinate all efforts, and providing the required investments to develop and improve the official statistical work, so we can increase the benefit from the limited resources in the country to achieve comprehensive development in the society.
2. The official statistical information must be handled as public goods necessary for the benefit of the society with its different groups or categories. Therefore, producing high quality statistics should be the first priority of the country.
3. Supporting the coordination between all the statistical producers partners. This will not be achieved without building a national strategy for the development of statistics (**NSDS**) which should be committed from all parties.
4. Increasing the benefit from the administrative registers, from different authorities to produce harmonized statistics along with the international statistical standards, practice and concepts. The statistics that are derived from the administrative registers are characterized by its low cost, compared to the surveys and census.

Seventh: Conclusions

The statistical information is the eyes which the decision makers depend on to develop our country.

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