

Statistical Capacity Building: Discussion Paper for Roundtable 4 (“Managing for Results”)

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Few dispute the crucial role played by statistics in the “downstream” development processes of monitoring policy implementation and evaluating policy impact. However, a growing consensus is now forming that data are equally critical for the “upstream” processes of identifying emerging issues, informing the design of policy and setting targets, and forecasting future trends. As such, statistics help provide a framework for holding governments and donors to account, managing for development results, and advancing aid effectiveness.

While the international development community has come to recognise the need for basing policies on sound and transparent evidence, some developing countries have encountered difficulties in building the capacity to produce, analyse, and use data. It is for this reason that PARIS21 — the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century, hosted by the OECD’s Development Co-operation Directorate — places capacity building at the very core of its work. The Partnership’s goal is to develop a culture of evidence-based policy making and implementation which serves to improve governance and government effectiveness in reducing poverty and achieving the MDGs.

To achieve this goal, PARIS21 assists developing countries to design, implement, and monitor a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS). An NSDS is expected to provide a country with a strategy for strengthening statistical capacity across the entire national statistical system (NSS). The NSDS will provide a vision for where the NSS should be in five to ten years and will set milestones for getting there. It will present a comprehensive and unified framework for continual assessment of evolving user needs and priorities for statistics and for building the capacity needed to meet these priorities in a more co-ordinated, synergistic, and efficient manner. It will also establish a framework for mobilising, harnessing, and leveraging resources (both national and international) and a basis for effective and results-oriented strategic management of the NSS.

The importance of these NSDS processes, aligned with national priorities and providing a framework for harmonised donor support, has been echoed at the Second and Third International Roundtables on Managing for Development Results. At the Second Roundtable, participants agreed a “Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics” (MAPS), which outlined six priority actions (on both the national and international levels) for increasing statistical capacity in developing countries. MAPS placed strategic planning at the centre of capacity building efforts, alongside population censuses, increased investment in statistics, better co-ordination of household surveys, improved MDG monitoring, and improved international accountability in statistics. The Third Roundtable reaffirmed the spirit and direction of the MAPS.

The Roundtables have helped form a consensus that the only realistic and sustainable way to provide the data needed to support development efforts is to promote efficient and effective national statistical systems, which are grounded in and directly linked to poverty reduction strategies or other national development plans. Furthermore, support to statistics must be scaled up, based on well prepared and realistic NSDSs, which involve harmonised and co-ordinated donor support. This recognition has led to the establishment of the Statistics for Results Facility (SFRF) whose aim is to provide funding to accelerate the strengthening of statistical systems in developing countries and thereby stimulate sustained improvement in the availability of and access to reliable statistics in order to better measure and manage for development results.

The NSDS, MAPS, and SFRF processes represent an international consensus on the way forward for developing statistical capacity. Several donors have already committed significant funds to support these initiatives. Other technical and financial partners have demonstrated serious interest in participating in the country-level partnership proposed by the SFRF and PARIS21, which aims to bring together donors and national stakeholders to agree a collaboration mechanism centred on NSDSs.