

Making data count

*A collection of good practices in using statistics
for policymaking*



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United Nations publication

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Foreword

For data producers, seeing their work transformed into policy is no longer simply the icing on the cake of a job well done. Producing statistics that are then used by decision makers, as well as the public, is the end goal, the whole purpose of the work - or at least it should be.

There has been a focus in recent years on strengthening national capacity to use statistics to inform broad social and economic policymaking, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Many of these activities address either the 'upstream' issues of data collection, or 'downstream' issues of dissemination, access, analysis, communication and interpretation.

In Asia and the Pacific, meeting the demand for statistics in policy analysis and advocacy, remains a challenge. While it is necessary to focus on weak areas and tackle problems, it is also important to identify and reflect on what is or has worked in the region. Focusing on good practices gives national statistical systems (NSSs) the opportunity to celebrate their many achievements. Showcasing successes allows others facing similar challenges to see possible strategies and what might be replicated.

The NSSs in Asia and the Pacific, and the political, economic and social contexts in which they operate, are diverse. These differences provide an ideal opportunity for mutual learning and sharing experience.

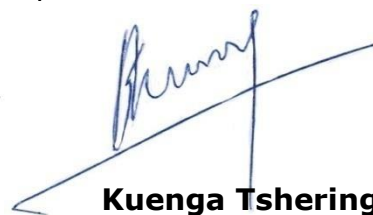
This publication showcases best practices in using official statistics to influence policy by detailing examples from across Asia and the Pacific.

The process of transforming statistical information into decision-making is a complex one and subject to many factors external to statistical evidence. The chosen case studies vary in scope and implementation, from data analysis to improving data sharing methods.

We hope this publication is a means of inspiration and motivation. The framework for assessing and documenting experiences is a guide to showcasing our achievements. We hope it leads to sharing of more experiences and thus help all NSS's improve the quality of their work.



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Introduction

This publication presents good practices in enhancing the use of official statistics in policy and decision-making. It is divided into the following parts.

Part I: Setting the tone

Comprising two papers, Part I gives a valuable background to the presentation of good practices.

The effective use of statistical data is essential for informed decision-making. However, much remains to be done to improve the availability and use of relevant statistical information. One way to strengthen capacity is to focus and expand on successes in the region by sharing good practices.

The first paper provides a framework for identifying and documenting good practices in using statistics.

The second provides a valuable overview of evidence-based policymaking. Having the evidence is not by itself sufficient to bring about change. It requires institutional frameworks that encourage disseminate and defend good evaluation, and that make the most of opportunities to learn.

Collection of good practices

The remainder of the publication presents twelve case studies, contributed by countries and one international organization.

The studies are grouped under three themes:

- Part II: Improving the relevance of statistics

- Part III: Bringing statistics closer to users

- Part IV: Using statistics to inform decision making

Each case study focuses on different aspects of improving data availability and use. They outline the demand for data and how the needs were met either through new collections or making better use of existing data.

The good practices highlight both the successes and the challenges, providing useful examples that can inspire others.

A short summary of each case study is below.

Part II: Improving the relevance of statistics

Relevance is a primary dimension of data quality. For statistics to be useful in policymaking, they have to be relevant to the data users' needs.

Case studies from Australia, Bangladesh, India and Nepal highlight different approaches to improving the relevance of official statistics.

The On Track student destinations monitoring project: The Collection and use of statistical data on student transition outcomes in Victoria (Australia)

Victoria is one of eight States and Territories in Australia. A major issue facing state education authorities is to ensure that all young school leavers either undertake further study or training, or obtain a job. In 2003, the Department of Education and Training adopted a survey data tool intended to monitor the destinations of all schoolleavers (the survey is known as the *On Track* survey). The survey was designed to capture the destinations of different groups of young people (e.g., indigenous, low supplemental education services (SES)).

Several valuable outcomes have been achieved as a result of this annual survey:

- every secondary school in the state receives a report on the destinations of its exiting students along with comparative tables. This enables each school to examine patterns of post-school employment and further study or training and to identify any weaknesses in transition. As a result, planning of school programs has been significantly enhanced.
- authorities at a central, regional and local level each have detailed 'maps' that enable them to examine what happens to particular sub-groups across the state or across a region or local area.
- each student leaving school whose employment or education destination is problematic is offered personalized career counselling in order to assist them to find work or an appropriate education or training opportunity.

How to fix a census: Lessons learned from Bangladesh

Population censuses are a key data source for Bangladesh, one of the poorest and fastest growing countries in the world. Significant challenges were identified in the 2001 census, with data quality and timeliness issues causing major problems. A decade later, the government set out to learn from the lessons and improve on the experience of 2001.

The case study details how each of the issues from the 2001 census were dealt with in the planning for the 2011 census. It concludes that the overall census procedure was significantly improved and the efforts led to greater accuracy and timeliness.

Improving agricultural statistics to support food security in India

This case study from India demonstrates how agricultural statistics can be more effective with the introduction of new tools and techniques, such as remote sensing and Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Remote sensing applications can help in crucial policy decisions, especially in a food security context. India has a variety of remote sensing-enabled products and services, which have formed the basis to enhance the information base in agriculture and to facilitate well-informed decision-making processes.

Remote sensing and GIS address some of the critical inadequacies in traditional agriculture statistical systems. New technologies and methods better capture the dynamics and vulnerability of agricultural systems, and thus provide information which is critical for decision-making at various levels.

The systems have yielded tangible benefits. Improved statistics has the potential to mitigate future losses if information is made available in a way that encourages government, private individuals and businesses to act on the information. This is exactly what has been demonstrated in a variety of agriculture related remote sensing applications in India.

Surveying a hidden population: Uncovering hard drug use in Nepal

Like many other countries, drug control has become a serious challenge for the Government of Nepal. Due to changes in drug taking, a lack of reliable statistics on the population size and characteristics of hard drug users was an obstacle to formulating effective policies and programs.

Based on the need for better data, Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) successfully developed and conducted a survey, for the first time, on hard drug users in 2006.

The outcome of the survey was twofold. It benchmarked the total number of hard drug users in the country for the first time and also revealed characteristics of drug users. The survey also provided an ideal opportunity to train and increase in-house technical capacity within the Nepalese statistics office.

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