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# Ten Recommendations for Improving Coordination within National Statistical Systems in GCC Countries

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*These recommendations draw heavily on existing guidelines developed by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (PARIS21) and others (see References at the end of the document). The material has been adapted to the GCC region context and specificities when considered necessary.*

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## What is a National Statistical System?

The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) defines the National Statistical System (NSS) as a system bringing together key stakeholders and institutions involved in producing, supplying and using official statistics, and training centers. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines it as the ensemble of statistical organizations and units within a country that jointly collect, process and disseminate official statistics on behalf of national government.

Typically, the National Statistics Center (NSC) has a legal mandate to coordinate activities so that data collected, compiled, analyzed and disseminated by different sectors and agencies in the NSS are consistent and coherent, and can be used with confidence. Sectoral statistics (environment, energy, agriculture, health, education, etc.) are typically produced through the statistical system of each sector, which may be functionally centralized or decentralized within the NSS.

## Why these recommendations?

The main aim of these recommendations is to provide National Statistics Centers in GCC countries with a short summary of the main international recommendations to significantly and sustainably improve coordination of their respective National Statistical Systems, which in turn will contribute to reaching the following objectives:

- Improve the productivity of data collection, management and communication;
- Increase the timeliness and availability of harmonized, high quality data;
- Raise the efficiency and impact of human and financial resources, including by reducing unnecessary duplication of efforts in the context of scarce human resources; and
- Raise the culture of statistics and the public profile of statistics and information.

## How to improve coordination in the NSS?

### Ten recommendations

The first prerequisite of achieving a significant level of coordination in a National Statistical System is a full commitment on the part of its leadership, starting with the Head of the National Statistics Center. Their leadership, management, advocacy and communication skills will prove to be key elements in bringing together such a variety of stakeholders and institutions, and channeling their efforts to develop a statistical system, which is able to provide relevant, timely and high quality statistical data and information to guide decision and policy making, planning, monitoring of progress and evaluation of performances.

In addition, the following ten recommendations should be fully implemented, while taking into consideration each country's context and specificities:

## 1. Establish/strengthen the NSDS participative process

The National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) is the internationally recognized tool for planning medium and long-term development of National Statistical Systems. The NSDS provides a forum for a continuous dialogue between the main stakeholders – users and producers of statistics – to build a national consensus on the long-term vision, strategy and action plans for sustainably developing the NSS. The aim is that the NSS continuously produces and disseminates high quality, relevant and timely statistical data and information, which meet the needs of users in the government, other public entities, the private sector, researchers and academics, and the public in general.

The NSDS should be accompanied with a two to three-year Implementation Plan (possibly with rolling time horizon), which sets the priorities in terms of projects and activities – whether new or ongoing – the responsible entities/units, and a reasonable timeframe, while keeping in mind the actual capacities – both human and financial – to actually execute the projects and activities. Also, the risks associated with the implementation should be clearly stated, along with measures to mitigate their negative impact.

The National Statistics Center (NSC) leadership should make sure that there is significant and continuous participation of the major stakeholders – users and producers alike – in the NSDS process, in order to ensure full ownership and strong support on their part. It is recommended that a **Steering Committee** be put in place to oversee NSDS design, implementation and evaluation, monitor progress in achieving objectives and goals, and identify steps to overcome difficulties and weaknesses in the process, as necessary. The Steering Committee should comprise representatives of the various components of the NSS as well as important users and champions of statistics.

There should also be **Thematic Working Groups** to support the work of the National Steering Committee, with more in-depth coverage of the most important sectors/themes in the country. Their composition should include representatives of the main statistical data and information users and producers.

In addition, the Head of the NSC should appoint a senior manager as the “**NSDS Coordinator**”. His/her role will be to lead the entire NSDS process, including organization of meetings of the Steering Committee, implementation of their recommendations, managing relationships with the different components of the NSS and the user communities with respect to the NSDS, etc.

There is substantial guidance material on the Internet, which should help the NSC better manage the NSDS process. As an example, PARIS21 has launched a web site dedicated to guidance on this important subject (<http://nsdguidelines.paris21.org/>).

## 2. Adapt the legal framework

The Statistics Law typically defines the mandates and obligations of all stakeholders of the National Statistical System and organizes the relationships between them, on one hand, and between data producers and respondents (households, businesses, individuals), on the other hand. It usually designates the National Statistics Center as the coordinator of the NSS and, in most cases, the main (or only) source of official data and statistical information about the country.

In some countries, the legal and institutional framework should be revised and updated, to take fully into account the implications of the tremendous developments taking place over the last years in the statistics sector, as well as the evolving needs and requirements of all stakeholders in the NSS.

GCC-Stat will work with NSCs to progressively develop and implement harmonized statistics laws across the region, through establishing and operating a Working Party of Legal Experts, and providing training and technical support where and when necessary.

## 3. Create/strengthen coordination mechanisms within the NSS

As mentioned above, the Statistics Law determines the relationships between the different components of the NSS. Good practices around the world suggest, for each country, to examine whether the following structures would be relevant in their own contexts:

Structure	Nature, composition and organization	Main Functions
<b>National Statistics Council</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory body;</li> <li>• Representatives of the main data users and decision-makers (in government ministries and agencies, the private sector, the civil society, academics, etc.);</li> <li>• Representatives of data producers (the National Statistical System);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advise the leadership of the NSS on important strategic issues, priority action plans, etc.;</li> <li>• Discuss the annual or multi-year Action Plans of the NSS, including analyzing the strengths and weaknesses, and advising on the way forward;</li> <li>• Contribute to the efforts to improve the use of data;</li> <li>• Contribute to the efforts to raise the profile of statistics.</li> </ul>

Structure	Nature, composition and organization	Main Functions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High level representation (deputy ministers or permanent secretaries);</li> <li>• Meets once a year.</li> </ul>	
<b>National Coordination Committee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination body;</li> <li>• Heads of data producing structures (the National Statistical System);</li> <li>• Meet once a year.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approve the annual or multi-year Action Plans of the NSS;</li> <li>• Lead efforts to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Improve harmonization of concepts, definitions, methodologies, coverage, classifications, and dissemination practices across the NSS;</li> <li>✚ Coordinate main field activities;</li> <li>✚ Increase quality across the NSS;</li> <li>✚ Develop capacities in the entire NSS.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Sectoral/thematic Working Groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination bodies;</li> <li>• Report to the National Coordination Committee;</li> <li>• Representatives of relevant data producers (the National Statistical System);</li> <li>• Meet quarterly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide technical support to the National Coordination Committee;</li> <li>• Propose an Action Plan to improve harmonization of concepts, definitions, methodologies, coverage, classifications, and dissemination practices, and increase quality across the NSS (<b>This should be part of the NSDS, if in place</b>);</li> <li>• Propose a coordinated schedule of the main field activities;</li> <li>• Assess current capacities, and propose a Capacity Development Plan for the whole NSS.</li> </ul>

The number of the Sectoral/thematic Working Groups and the sectors/themes they cover will depend on each country's context and priorities. Countries may find it useful to mirror the governance structure in place at GCC-Stat, which includes five Committees on: (i) Population and Social Statistics; (ii) Economic Statistics; (iii) Development, Progress and Sustainability Indicators; (iv) Standards Classifications and Data Quality; and (v) Information and Communications Technologies.

In establishing the National Statistics Council, the National Coordination Committee and the Sectoral/thematic Working Groups, the NSC should make sure that all relevant and concerned stakeholders are represented and actively involved.

In countries where an NSDS process is in place or foreseen in the near future, the National Statistics Council could play the role of the above-mentioned NSDS Steering Committee, and the Sectoral/thematic Working Groups' responsibilities would include the work normally attributed to the Thematic Working Groups also mentioned above. This scenario favors UNSD's definition of the NSS, which includes users of official statistics in addition to the producers.

#### **4. Develop and enforce a Code of Practice and a Data Quality Framework**

The Statistics Law should require that statistical activities in the country be carried-out in conformity with a Code of Practice, which clearly shows the commitment of the National Statistical System to apply highly ethical and professional standards in collecting, compiling, analyzing and disseminating official statistics. Such a Code of Practice should enhance user confidence and trust in the data and statistical information produced and disseminated by the NSS. It should also provide assurances to households and businesses of the secrecy of the information provided by them during data collection. The National Statistics Centre should work with the other components of the NSS to establish and enforce the Code, and monitor its implementation. The Code should be made public.

The Statistics Law should also require the establishment of a Data Quality Framework in support of the Code of Practice mentioned above. This Framework should include all dimensions of data quality, namely relevance, accuracy, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, comparability, and coherence. It should clearly state how these different dimensions of data quality will be implemented and monitored.

GCC-Stat will work with NSCs to establish a common GCC-wide Code of Practice and Data Quality Framework, and provide training and technical support to countries when and where needed.

#### **5. Develop an NSS-wide human resource policy**

The issue of adequate staffing in statistics is a major concern across the GCC region, where most National Statistical Systems experience difficulties to attract and keep enough qualified national staff.

Efforts to develop statistical and related capacities should be further strengthened and harmonized across the entire NSS. In particular, there is a need to develop capacities in less traditional areas such as leadership, communication, awareness raising, and

marketing. The National Statistics Centre should take the lead in coordinating and facilitating joint training workshops, exchange of experiences, and secondment of staff (where relevant and possible). Furthermore, the NSC should study the possibility of conducting/facilitating peer reviews within the NSS, as they have proven to be effective contributors to developing capacities in other parts of the world.

Countries should each develop a comprehensive human resource strategy and implementation plan, with uniform training, recruitment and promotion procedures for all staff working in the National Statistical System.

## **6. Mainstream the use of ICTs across the entire NSS**

It is a well-known fact that the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) tools can be effective in reducing human error, and expediting data collection, processing, analysis and dissemination. The National Statistics Centre should facilitate generalization of these tools to all phases of statistical processes (censuses, surveys, etc.) in the country.

As the NSC generally has the mandate to collect and disseminate data and statistical information produced by other government entities in addition to its own data collection through field work (surveys and census), efforts should be put in place to connect all producers of official statistics through a secured network. This would greatly facilitate data and metadata transmission between different components of the NSS, reduce the errors that can occur in traditional transmission, and expedite dissemination.

## **7. Harmonize data collection and management processes**

As was mentioned above, it is very important to improve harmonization of concepts, definitions, methodologies, coverage, classifications, dissemination practices and main field activities (where relevant), and increase quality across the NSS. The recommended Sectoral Coordination Committees should play a key role in achieving this major objective. They should work to establish a harmonized data production schedule across the NSS.

In terms of data management, a coherent management information system should be put in place across the entire NSS, including a common data warehouse. The idea to connect all producers of data mentioned in the ICTs recommendation above should also include establishing this data warehouse.

## **8. Agree and implement a comprehensive data dissemination policy**

The Code of Practice mentioned above should indicate a number of principles and practices with respect to the release of data and statistical information. In addition, countries should develop and implement a full data dissemination policy in conformity and implementation of the principles and practices stated in the Code of Practice.



In particular, the NSC should facilitate discussions within the NSS on the possibility of allowing users to access micro data (i.e., data at the level of the individual respondent) for research purposes. This would require inventorying, documenting and archiving existing survey micro data. In particular, the International Household Survey Network has developed a freely accessible, open source survey and census cataloguing software, to help inform the users about the existence and characteristics of available survey and census data (<http://www.ihsn.org/home/software/nada>).

In terms of dissemination through the Internet, GCC-Stat and a number of countries are developing data web portals. It is important that data and metadata be made available through searchable, user-friendly databases on these portals, along with reports, bulletins, etc.

## **9. Develop and implement a coherent NSS-wide advocacy, communication and marketing strategy**

The National Strategy for the Development of Statistics should be accompanied by a coherent advocacy, communication and marketing strategy and implementation plan for the entire National Statistical System. Such a strategy and implementation plan should allow different components of the NSS to proactively communicate and market data and statistical information to current and potential users, as well as promote awareness of the importance of statistics and raise the profile of statistical work in general.

In particular, National Statistics Centres (NSCs) should strive, in collaboration with all stakeholders of the NSS, to raise the profile of statistical work in national development plans and strategies. Indeed, it is important that statistics be treated as a "sector" in these national development strategies and plans, with a full SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the current situation, and discussion of the long-term vision, strategy and action plan (i.e., the NSDS).

GCC-Stat will develop guidelines on statistical advocacy, communication and marketing, share them with countries, and provide training and technical support as and when needed.

## **10. Measure and monitor progress towards achieving better coordination**

The above recommendations should be fully implemented, and progress in their implementation should be closely monitored. All related activities should be included in the NSDS and its Implementation Plan, with relevant Key Performance Indicators (as a subset of the overall NSDS KPIs).

The following table suggests some of these KPIs, with possible milestones in 2016 and 2017:

Objectives	KPIs	Current situation	Situation in 2016	Situation in 2017
1. Establish/strengthen the NSDS participative process	Is there an NSDS process in place?	Yes/no, no but planned	Yes	Yes
	If yes, how well does it operate? (*)			
	Is there an Implementation Plan?	Yes/no, no but planned	Yes	Yes
	If yes, percentage of execution of priority projects/activities in the Implementation Plan (by project, and/or by statistical field, etc.) (**)		80%	90%
2. Adapt the legal framework	Is the Statistics Law up-to-date?	Yes/no, no but update planned	Yes	Yes
	If yes, how well is it implemented? (*)			
3. Create/strengthen coordination mechanisms	Is there an overall statistical coordination committee?	Yes/no, no but planned	Yes	Yes
	If yes, how well does it operate? (*)			
	Are there sectoral coordination committees?	Yes/no, no but planned	Yes	Yes
	If yes, how well do they operate? (*)			
4. Develop and enforce a Code of Practice and a Data Quality Framework	Is a Code of Practice in place?	Yes/no, no but planned	Yes	Yes
	If yes, how well is it implemented? (*)			
	Is a Data Quality Framework in place?	Yes/no, no but planned	Yes	Yes
	If yes, how well is it implemented? (*)			
5. Develop an NSS-wide human resource policy	Is an NSS-wide human resource policy in place?	Yes/no, no but planned	Yes	Yes
	Percentage of NSS positions filled with nationals			
	Percentage of NSS staff with a Master's degree or above			

Objectives	KPIs	Current situation	Situation in 2016	Situation in 2017
	Percentage of NSS staff receiving training relevant to their work		No less than 80%	100%
6. Mainstream the use of ICTs across the NSS	Percentage of work carried-out using ICTs, by main activities (data collection, compilation, analysis, dissemination, planning, etc.) (*)		No less than 90%	100%
7. Harmonize data collection and management processes	Percentage of components of the NSS using the latest statistical standards		No less than 80%	100%
	Percentage of components of the NSS using the latest classifications		No less than 80%	100%
	Percentage of components of the NSS using harmonized definitions and concepts		No less than 80%	100%
	Percentage of components of the NSS connected to each other with a secured network		No less than 80%	100%
	Is a common data warehouse in place?	Yes/no, no but planned	Yes	Yes
8. Agree and implement a comprehensive data dissemination policy	Is a comprehensive data dissemination policy in place?	Yes/no, no but planned	Yes	Yes
	If yes, how well is it implemented? (*)			
9. Develop and implement a coherent advocacy, communication and marketing strategy	Is a coherent advocacy, communication and marketing strategy in place?	Yes/no, no but planned	Yes	Yes
	If yes, how well is it implemented? (*)			
	Does the national development plan include a full chapter on the statistics "sector"?	Yes/no, no but ongoing efforts	Yes/no, no but ongoing efforts	Yes

Objectives	KPIs	Current situation	Situation in 2016	Situation in 2017
10. Measure progress towards achieving better coordination	Are all relevant KPIs clearly identified and regularly monitored?	Yes/no, no but ongoing efforts	Yes	Yes

(\* ) More explicit measures should be developed.

(\*\* ) A dashboard including projects, activities, KPIs, should be developed and maintained.

### **References and useful links:**

1. PARIS21 NSDS Guidelines website: <http://nsdsguidelines.paris21.org/>
2. The Handbook of Statistical Organization (Third Edition), United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/hb/default.aspx>)
3. *Mainstreaming sectoral statistical systems in Africa: A guide to planning a coordinated national statistical system*, African Development Bank, Intersect and PARIS21, November 2007 (<http://nsdsguidelines.paris21.org/node/524>)
4. Micro-data Cataloging Tool (NADA), International Household Survey Network (IHSN) (<http://www.ihsn.org/home/software/nada>)