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Coordination of statistical capacity-building activities:

Statistical training

**Response to request for information for preparation of document
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Statistics¹**

Introduction

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) is the statistical office of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and the United Nations depository for global statistics in the fields of education, science and technology, culture and communication. Furthermore, UIS is the official data source at the global level for Education for All (EFA) and the education-related targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

UIS is fully aware that quality of international data is entirely dependent on the quality of national data. Thus, the best way of improving international monitoring of EFA is to improve the national data by strengthening national capacity of the relevant stakeholders who are involved in it. Since the institute was created in 1999, working with Member States to strengthen their national capacities to collect and analyze data of relevance to their policy initiatives has always been an integral part of the institute's work. As described in its Medium-Term Strategy (2008-2013)², capacity development is one of the core programme activities of the institute.

In order to provide better support and establish a strong network with the Member States and other regional and national partners in the region, UIS Regional office for Asia and the Pacific, called UIS-AIMS (Assessment, Information, Management and Statistics) unit, was

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² http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=7018_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC

established in 2002. It serves as a regional arm of the UIS, as well as part of the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education for Asia and the Pacific, covering 46 Member States in the region. Among its various functions and responsibilities, statistical capacity development is its core mandate. The UIS-AIMS unit assists various line ministries and national statistical offices to enhance their capacities for data collection, processing, quality assurance, analysis and dissemination through training and other forms of support.

Having only a regional advisor at the beginning of its set up, the UIS team of Asia and the Pacific has ever been expanding and now has eight programme staff (one based in UNESCO Delhi and another based in UNESCO Apia). All of them have been involved in capacity development in their respective programme and geographic areas. On various occasions, staff members from UIS Montreal also join with its regional staff to provide capacity development activities in the region.

UIS-AIMS Capacity Development Strategy

In line with the UIS global strategy, the UIS-AIMS' statistical capacity development strategy in Asia and the Pacific region is based on three key principles – Promoting partnership, ensuring long term sustainability and addressing the needs of its Member States. The ultimate aim of its support on statistical capacity development is to have sustainable national capacity in the region to efficiently produce quality statistics and effectively use of them to promote evidence-based policy formulation, result-oriented programme implementation and systematic monitoring of programmes. To have such sustainable national capacity, the support needs to be planned and prepared for long term, continuous involvement rather than ad-hoc and one-shot activities.

With this vision, the UIS-AIMS unit, in partnership with UIS Montreal and other regional and national partners, is providing various capacity development activities in the region to strengthen national statistical capacity in the following areas –

- developing, establishing, improving and harmonizing of statistical standards and procedures;
- designing, streamlining and instituting mechanisms and practices for collection, processing, validation and dissemination of statistics;
- improving timeliness, consistency, reliability and validity of data;
- transforming data into appropriate, relevant and useful information for policy and programme formulation, implementation and monitoring;
- utilizing resources efficiently for statistical works;
- conducting sound and relevant researches and analyses, and utilizing the results effectively for informed policies; and
- promoting and practicing integrity, transparency and good governance through appropriate and effective use of statistics.

To achieve maximum impact on building sustainable capacity at its Member States, the UIS-AIMS unit is strengthening the capacity of all levels, from individual to institutional.

At the individual level, UIS-AIMS strives to equip relevant and necessary skill competency, as well as to develop professionalism by

- conducting regional and national workshops and seminars;
- coaching national staff with on-the job trainings;
- arranging study tours to exchange and share experience;

- identifying and coaching national staff to become trainers; and
- developing and disseminating relevant training materials.

At the organizational level, UIS-AIMS strives to effectively utilize its human, financial, technical resources to build strong infrastructure by assisting country teams and relevant institutions to

- conduct data review and system diagnostic studies;
- prepare project proposals and fund mobilization;
- develop capacity development strategies;
- design and conduct joint training courses and training programmes with other national partners; and
- establish a unit to collect, analyze, produce and disseminate the statistics.

At the institutional level, UIS-AIMS strives to systematize and institutionalize statistical practices and standards by

- assisting the establishment and systematic functioning of interagency country teams on improving quality of data and effective use of them;
- coordinating and facilitating in harmonization, and streamlining of statistical practices and standards among all relevant stakeholders;
- assisting in the design and formulation of national statistical capacity development strategy; and
- assisting in formulation, implementation and monitoring of rules, regulations and procedures to promote a culture of integrity, transparency and good governance through effective use of statistics.

UIS-AIMS Capacity Development Programmes and Activities (2002 – 2010)

In the eight years since its establishment, in collaboration with various regional and national partners, the UIS-AIMS unit has been actively providing the above-mentioned capacity development activities in the areas of education, culture, communication and science.

Education

In the area of education, the current focus of the UIS-AIMS' capacity development activities is systematic monitoring of EFA (Education for All), aiming towards the EFA 2015 assessment and beyond. The primary recipients of its capacity development support are staff members from ministries of education in the region who are heavily involved in collecting, processing, ensuring quality, analyzing, producing, disseminating and utilizing education related statistics, particularly those for monitoring EFA and the MDGs. They range from technical staff and education planners to decision makers. Furthermore, officials from national statistics offices, other line ministries, educational research institutions, non-governmental and civic organizations, and mass media also have benefitted from UIS-AIMS' capacity development activities.

Throughout its eight years, more than 500 individuals, not only from the Asia and Pacific region but also from Africa, Arab States and Latin America, have received UIS-AIMS' support to strengthen their capacities through various regional and national workshops, seminars and technical missions. Furthermore, the UIS-AIMS unit has given special attention to, and is substantially involved in, some countries in the region helping to strengthen and sustain their organizational and institutional capacities in the area of education statistics

covering both formal and non-formal education, including literacy. Those include – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

As mentioned above in its strategy, partnership is the cornerstone of the successful expansion and substantial achievement of UIS-AIMS' commitment and effort to strengthen sustainable national statistical capacity in its Member States. Those partners are from both regional and national levels and include: Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP), UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific (UNICEF EAPRO), Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization: Regional Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO INNOTECH), National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA – India), Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM – Pakistan), South Pacific Board For Educational Assessment (SPBEA) as well as UNESCO and UNICEF field offices. Furthermore, the Japanese Government, through its funds-in-trust programmes, and Nordic countries through their programmes on capacity development on EFA, made significant financial contributions to the implementation of the UIS-AIM's programme on statistical capacity development.

Some of the concrete achievements in which the UIS-AIMS unit has significantly contributed are:

- successful establishment and sustainable functioning of national education statistical information system (called flash system) in the department of education in Nepal: previously, Nepal didn't have a regular systematic data collection system from schools and therefore, no reliable school data for informed decision making. Now, Nepal is regularly collecting the data from schools twice a year and producing national education statistical yearbook annually. Data from the flash system is the major source for the education sector strategy and donor support programmes. Furthermore, the national team is now taking full responsibility and implementing all activities with minimum external support.
- development of national education management information system (EMIS) in Timor-Leste: through the EMIS, the ministry of education is regularly conducting a school census, and this year, for the first time since its independence, an annual school census report will be published. The data from EMIS is the official source of school related data.
- development of national education management information system in Afghanistan: this is now the 3rd year since the ministry of education set up its EMIS unit and an annual school census has been regularly conducted. The system has been gradually expanding its coverage and, as a result of its achievement, the government and local developmental partners have decided to strengthen EMIS activities at the provincial level.
- as a good example of south-south cooperation: in collaboration and technical contribution of various institutions and experts within the region, the UIS-AIMS unit is developing training modules on systematic monitoring of EFA, which will be published soon. These training modules will be core technical documents for conducting the EFA 2015 assessment in the region.
- successful conduct of EFA Mid-Decade Assessment (EFA-MDA) (2007): more than 30 national reports and 4 sub-regional reports have been produced.

Some of the key factors contributing to the success of such activities are:

- the demand comes from countries, rather than being agency driven;

- the training materials and programmes have been designed to genuinely address the needs of the countries, and to align and link with strategic priorities of the national education sector programme;
- the provision of adequate support and follow up from field offices and local partners; and
- the utilization of a participatory approach that includes listening to the needs of the recipients, and allowing them to participate and contribute from the beginning of the design stage.

Still many challenges remained to be overcome. Some of the key issues which need attention are:

- a lack of transparency in the selection of an appropriate person to receive the relevant capacity enhancement;
- a lack of a conducive environment and/or opportunities for staff members to use what they have learnt through the capacity development activities;
- a lack of support and commitment from senior management;
- a lack of long term vision and strategy for sustainable capacity development;
- a lack of materials in local language, and well-experienced trainers to effectively conduct national training programmes;
- a lack of communication skills of some to effectively participate in regional level training programmes;
- a lack of user-relevant training materials and programmes; and
- a lack of follow up and rigorous evaluation mechanisms and practices to monitor and measure the impact of training and interventions.

Having experience from the past, and taking into account future needs, the capacity development activities, programmes and interventions of the UIS-AIMS unit will reflect and encourage:

- the promotion and facilitation south-south and north-south cooperation;
- the full exploitation of state of the art, but affordable technology;
- the participation of more stakeholders in the design and evaluation stages to develop suitable and appropriate training materials and programmes for the targeted users;
- the expansion of training programmes and interventions beyond EFA; and
- the achievement of full country ownership.

Regional coordination of training

Partnership and coordination with other relevant regional and national institutions to undertake capacity development activities could result in more efficient use of scarce resources; create synergy in producing maximum intended results; and reach a wider range of diverse recipients. In line with its strategy that partnership is a key fundamental principle, the UIS-AIMS unit is carrying out various capacity development activities in partnership with other relevant regional and national institutions in the region as stated above. These joint activities include conducting joint training programmes, developing locally relevant training materials, preparing joint project proposals, mobilizing funds, and exchanging and sharing information.

As resources become scarcer, and the demand to build new skills and competencies increase as required by ever challenging and changing 21st century needs, coordination will become an essential part of future capacity development programmes and activities.

At the regional level, a forum with a workable implementation mechanism needs to be set up by all relevant participating partners to (i) develop coherent strategies and programme activities, (ii) exchange and share resources and information, and (iii) jointly mobilize funding. Not only *interregional* coordination, but also *intra*regional collaboration should be taken into account, particularly for South–South coordination.

Capacity development in other areas of statistics

In addition to the work of the UIS-AIMS unit in education, we are also involved in statistical capacity building in other UNESCO sectors, in particular culture and science. Coincidentally, the main arena for our work in both sectors is Vietnam.

UNESCO is working on an overall mapping of cultural statistics in Vietnam in conjunction with a wide range of national agencies. The aim is to present an overall view of cultural statistics in the country identifying gaps and duplication, as well as suggesting efficiencies through co-ordination mechanisms.

UIS-AIMS is also discussing a MoU with the National Agency for Science and Technology Information (NASATI) which would see the unit provide technical assistance in support of their mandate to carry out a national research & development (R & D) survey in 2011/12.

Also in the area of science, UIS-AIMS has produced working documents for the OECD Frascati manual on R & D statistics and the Oslo manual on innovation statistics detailing how these statistical standards may be adapted to non-OECD countries. These documents are being incorporated into the OECD standards.

UIS-AIMS expects to be involved in a similar exercise for culture and science in one or two countries each year. Some small scale technical advice on such issues has been presented during missions in 2010 in Laos, Mongolia, and Philippines.

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