

Approaching to Users with Statistical Products: An Experience of Decentralized Dissemination of Economic Census Results

Mahesh Chand Pradhan¹

¹ Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal

Email: mc_pradhan@hotmail.com; maheshcpradhan@gmail.com

Abstract:

In the democratic society, every aspects of development policies, plans and programs should be based on the quality statistical evidence which needs to be made informed to the concerned users. The fundamental principles of official statistics (FPOS) is the standard guideline for the national statistical systems towards producing the relevant statistics with professional standards that is accessible. Producing the data is only not sufficient but it is equally important to feel accountability by statistical agencies in making the users informed about the interpretation of data. Data producing authorities have role of sensitizing the public including the data users to ensure the cooperation to provide complete and accurate data but it is also equally important to inform public as well as data users about the data products. Keeping in touch with the users means to promote the practices of data utilization culture in the relevant decision-making process. Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), a nodal statistical agency of Nepal has realized its responsibility and accountability to be engaged with the users from the stage of data demand assessment, data collection to the data presentation guaranteeing the users' access to the necessary statistical products. CBS conducted the national economic census in 2018 for the first time in Nepal. Now, CBS is at the stage of releasing the different statistical series of census results based on the census data. CBS adopted decentralized dissemination of the census results to its remote users. An effective communication with an adequate publicity campaign, plays an essential role in ensuring the access of the census results. How to make the diverse users informed and literate to utilize about the census results in Nepal is the one of the big challenges which is associated with resource investment in reaching to the users. CBS has been making its efforts to be engaged with the data users via different means of dissemination media. The paper will discuss the aspects of approaching to diverse users from local level to the national level. The paper also discusses the producing type of census products and communicating with the users and the feedback from the dissemination.

Keywords: *evidence-based decision making, users access to users, economic census, dissemination, census/statistical products*

i. Introduction:

Producing statistics for evidence-based development has become an important component of the statistical programme of national statistical organizations. In democratic society, the statistics are contributory evidence in informing policy formulation processes. The statistics should play the role of best evidence in improving relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of policy, planning and other development programs. The evidence-based policy is an approach that assist the people in making well informed decisions about policies, plans and programmes by putting the best available evidence in the context of policy development and implementation (Pron, 2008). The Government of Nepal has emphasized the evidence-based policy and plan formulation at local, province and central level. The Constitution of Nepal, under the state policies relating to development reveals the constitutional policy evidences to develop the information infrastructure for promoting the evidence-based policy making in the development plans. Further, Nepal is committed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, the spirits of which have also been aligned in the 15th five-year periodic plans and annual budgets of central, provincial and local level governments. In this contextual perspective, it is the obligation of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), as national statistical organization (NSO) to fulfill the data demands by producing the relevant statistical products via different sources like census, surveys and administrative records. The fundamental principles of official statistics (FPOS) is the standard guideline adopted by CBS while producing the relevant statistics

2020 Asia–Pacific Statistics Week

A decade of action for the 2030 Agenda: Statistics that leaves no one and nowhere behind

15-19 JUNE 2020 | Bangkok, Thailand

that is accessible to the wide range of users. The CBS has made efforts in making the users' access to statistical products via various means of dissemination. It is necessary to approach the potential remote users sensitizing about the data products. The main objective of this paper is to reveal the decentralized dissemination of the statistical products of the economic census 2018 of Nepal as an approach to reach to the diverse stakeholders upto local level. The other purposes are to briefly discuss the legislative arrangements, existing dissemination practices, the economic census of Nepal and data products, approaches to reach stakeholders and implication from the dissemination at districts.

ii. Methodology:

The entire paper is the review of the relevant literatures like UN's fundamental principles of official statistics, prevailing legislations, national plans of government, statistical policies like national strategy for development of statistical system (NSDS), existing dissemination practices, and reports on the experiences gained from the implementation of economic census and disseminations. The paper will make descriptive discussion on the dissemination of data products limiting to the activities of CBS and more specifically on the economic census 2018 of Nepal.

iii. Result:

a. Legislative Arrangements:

Generally, the planning, implementation, publication and distribution of the relevant official statistics are undertaken under the prevailing statistical legislative frameworks of the country. The Statistics Act 1958, Statistics Regulations 1984, Census specific gadget (decree), official procedural guidelines 2007, National Strategy for Development of Statistical System (NSDS) and policy guidelines mentioned in the plan documents are the major statistical legislative frameworks to carry out the statistical production by CBS. The statistics act of Nepal states only the publication as one of the integrated tasks of statistical production in its preamble. However, the statistics regulation 1984 clearly mentions the publication as the obligatory responsibility of the director general. The central organisation guideline 1997 and CBS's official procedural guideline have undoubtedly pronounced the publication and distribution, and preservation of the statistical products as one of the objectives of CBS. Although CBS has a long experience on production of statistics on various sectors, the specific data dissemination policy does not exist yet. The dissemination in hardcopy or digital publications have been carried out under the prevailing legislative arrangements.

b. Dissemination Practices of CBS

The success of the plan formulation and its implementation depends on the utilisation of information and statistics as evidence-based decision making. Hence, the produced statistics should be disseminated in proper way. In general, dissemination refers to make statistical output available to the users. According to the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS), dissemination of data is the ultimate objective of any statistical system. While proceeding the dissemination, emphasis is given to the appropriate and the impartial methods (IMF, 2004).

CBS has a major role in disseminating the statistics obtained from census / survey programs or secondary sources. The users of the CBS statistics range from general public to the advanced users which include the major categories as planners and policy makers at various level of government (central, provincial and local), professionals, researchers, academicians, business communities, international agencies and journalists. The Publication, Distribution and Library section is the institutional set up responsible for the regular statistical publications, distribution to regular users in the mailing lists and ad-hoc users, and maintaining the library. The statistics offices (SO) in 33 districts are also a gateway of CBS data products for access of the users at the districts. The major statistical products are the fourth monthly Statistical Bulletin, Nepal in Figure, Statistical Year Book, Statistical Pocket Book, National Accounts Series, and Price Index. Similarly, CBS produces a volume of reports on the base of censuses and surveys as a periodic publication. The statistical reports of the non-periodic surveys are also the major publications of CBS.

2020 Asia–Pacific Statistics Week

A decade of action for the 2030 Agenda: Statistics that leaves no one and nowhere behind

15-19 JUNE 2020 | Bangkok, Thailand

Diverse modes of data dissemination are in practice like the press-release or conference, dissemination seminars, digital dissemination, uploading data in web portals, and print copy distribution. The publications are generally distributed to the mailing list users and the users who demand. The four-monthly bulletin, Nepal in Figure are distributed free and mostly other products are also distributed on free and fee in 50:50 ratio respectively. However, the digital copies of all the statistical products are uploaded in CBS website (www.cbs.gov.np) for free access. The national data profile (NDP) system is portal of data producers and data users for uploading and accessing various dimension of designated major data indicators (<http://nationaldata.gov.np/>). Many users also approach to CBS library to have access a varieties of CBS publications, and to the concerned relevant sections like Population Census section, Economic Census section, National Accounts section to get detail information. CBS has also established a National Data Archive (NADA), a web-based cataloguing system (<https://nada.cbs.gov.np/>), to preserve CBS operated census and survey data, statistical products along with other documents and, to facilitate the access to the wide spectrum of users.

c. Decentralised Data Dissemination of Economic Census Products

i. Economic Census 2018 of Nepal

CBS conducted the first National Economic Census in 2018 from 14 April to 14 June 2018 with the major objective of fulfilling the basic data gaps on basic economic statistics. The key objective of the Economic Census is to understand the economic structure comprised with diverse sector of economic activities and provide the statistical information to users. The scope of the economic census is based on the International Standard Industrial Classification based Nepal Standard Industrial Classification (NSIC-2018) items. The establishment is the enumeration unit in the economic census.

ii. Decentralised census operation

The term decentralization in relation to the economic census has been used in the sense of improved census governance, increased efficiency of census enumeration, making census awareness, census data processing and dissemination of the results. The decentralization was the delegation and devolution of the duties and responsibilities to the census offices and hence to the field workers for the smooth census operation. The decentralization practices were limited upto the implementation of census activities, keeping the authority down the chain of command. The decentralized census publicity was also practiced to increase the response rates. CBS also implemented the decentralized data processing through its statistics offices with the aim to release results timely. The first decentralized data processing of CBS is the successful experimentation of engaging the officials of statistics offices.

iii. Data dissemination and its decentralisation

Dissemination of the census results is the primary responsibility of CBS to inform and aware about census products to its users. The users were made satisfied with releasing the preliminary reports with two volumes (national and provincial summary) containing information on the number of establishments and persons engaged on September 13 2018 in CBS within two months of the completion of enumeration. The digital copy of these reports in both pdf and spreadsheets were uploaded for users' access <https://cbs.gov.np/preliminary-result-of-national-economic-census-2018-2/> .

1. Final Census Products

A growing interest have occurred towards getting the final results of the economic census on various characteristics by the various dimension of users. It has been a challenging task to release quantitative information of all the characteristics at once, hence, CBS has made the strategies to release the results in phase-wise up to 2020 for different statistical products. The released census reports are National Report 1-1 by Industry, National Report 1-2 by Size of Persons Engaged, National Report 1-3 by Province and Districts, Provincial Summary Reports (for seven provinces each) and Report in Nepali Version. The published reports have been distributed in hardcopies and uploaded in the CBS websites.

2020 Asia–Pacific Statistics Week

A decade of action for the 2030 Agenda: Statistics that leaves no one and nowhere behind

15-19 JUNE 2020 | Bangkok, Thailand

2. National Dissemination of Final Results

CBS aims to reach the statistics generated from the economic census to wide range of users. Hence, it organized a grand ceremony of national dissemination seminar inviting the major stakeholders with the presence of high-level dignitaries from national and international agencies on July 01 2019. The Economic Census provided voluminous information pertaining to establishments with different characteristics like distribution of number, registration status, gender, employments, business nature, account keeping etc. The economic census 2018 of Nepal resulted a total of 923,356 establishments engaging a total of 32,28,457 persons engaged in diverse industries categorized under ISIC sections.

3. Province and District Level Dissemination Programs

Realizing the responsibility of dissemination and making informed about the data to its users of the districts outside Kathmandu valley, a decentralised dissemination program was planned in the annual budgetary program in the first quarter of the current fiscal year 2019/2020. CBS authorized the 33 statistics offices to conduct dissemination seminars at districts. There is also a plan to disseminate results in the remaining districts in fiscal year 2020/21. A procedural guideline for the consistent disseminations was also circulated to the statistics offices for conducting the seminars. The guideline contained the information on the title of the program, target audiences, budgetary items provisioned, contents of seminar papers for presentation with template papers, outline of program, other directives like report submission. Accordingly, the respective statistics offices conducted the provincial and districts seminars in 34 districts. The program was conducted with standard title “Province/ District Level Dissemination Seminar of the National Economic Census 2018 Results”. The objectives of the district dissemination program are to provide the information to potential local level users on the statistical products resulted from the census, provide the knowledge on the basic concept of economic census, its process and utilization importance as evidence-based decision making upto the local level, encourage users to use data for their purpose of program development, get the feedback from the users to improve the census in the future, and establish the rapport with stakeholders to get cooperation and response in the future statistical operations.

Audiences of the Seminar

A wide variety of audiences have participated in all live dissemination events with about 1900 participants. The audiences of the seminars included the representatives from Planning Commission, District Administration offices, District coordination office along with other government offices, local level governments like province office or municipalities, academic institutes, Nepal Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry and other business organizations, media personnel, non- governmental organizations, Financial institutes, development partners, and civil society.

Proceeding of the program

The seminar was proceeded according to the program outline with two presentations on the economic census results. The first presentation focused on the objectives, concept and methodology on economic census, scope and coverage, importance of the census results at the local level with major findings at national level on economic census. The second presentation displayed the major census results at province, district and local levels. The presentations contained the tabular results as well as the visualizations with graphs and maps. The presentations contained results on number of establishments and persons engaged with the disaggregation based on administrative areas, ISIC status, registration status, gender status, operation status, business starting year, account keeping status etc.

Participants’ views

Understanding the stakeholders’ views towards the census products is important aspect for the statistical agencies to develop the users’ oriented statistical products. The dissemination seminars have become an appropriate forum to get to know the participants perspectives on the census data and their realization on it. The dissemination seminars have represented a direct face to face forum of users-producers, establishing the rapport with users for getting the cooperation in similar activities. In relation to the seminar, participants delighted to get information on the basic economic census results in their places. They realized the presented contents were useful that gave the insights on the economic composition of their respective local

2020 Asia–Pacific Statistics Week

A decade of action for the 2030 Agenda: Statistics that leaves no one and nowhere behind

15-19 JUNE 2020 | Bangkok, Thailand

areas. The views are expressed as just feelings, encouragement and acknowledgments, queries, expectations, suggestions and comments. The participants hoped the utilization of the census results for the formulation of local as well as district level planning and development. The feedback was also about to integrate the economic census results in reforming the revenue policy.

The participants also put the suggestive views to reach further to sub-district level, targeting to elected bodies, with the census products so that planning could be strengthened with the utilization of the local level data. Knowing the facts of about half of establishments in the unregistered status, less or more homogeneous registration status in all districts, made the participants amazed. They reacted the need of the immediate actions to formalize the unregistered enterprises. The other suggestions were the need of massive media campaign of the data, accept the weaknesses occurred in census operation, collect the information on active and inactive registered establishments, include the mobile businesses, integrated statistical database system of the establishments, enhance the methodology to overcome the exclusion, and recruitment of qualified students of the colleges. In some of the districts, participants suspected on under coverage of some industry sectors. While some also realized the occurrence of mistakes or under or over count in the census as the obvious fact. Some stakeholders were hopeful to get the statistics on information on income, expenditure and capital status, of which the results are remaining to release. Participants also ensured the suspect on census enumeration as for tax imposition was false because of data dissemination at district level.

In all the events, the stakeholders expressed commitment or realization of the need to cooperate CBS in the next economic census and similar statistical undertakings. Stakeholders were also entrusted to rely the statistical products of CBS as the CBS is a government's authentic statistical organization. A district level analytical reports was also opined by the participants to be more useful to understand the economic situation. Academic participants opined to have easy access on the data tables and publications for research as well to teach in the colleges and universities. The major stakeholders like Nepal Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry and business communities considered the census statistics as a guideline which will be utilized for promoting the business prosperity.

Response from organizer

The seminars were the good opportunity for statistics offices to show the gratitude and acknowledgement to the census respondents, field officials, officials who contributed cooperation to make the enumeration success, and to the seminar stakeholders for active participation in the dissemination. The chief officials of the statistics offices responded the enthusiasms or queries on the census results and related issues based on the census concept, definitions and methodologies. The assurance was also made to improve the quality of next census operation overcoming the present shortcomings by incorporating the participants' valuable feedback. The organizer also encouraged the stakeholders to utilize the published results and ensured to cooperate the users to facilitate in interpreting the data or access for the available census data in the statistics offices. Further, the stakeholders were informed to have access the CBS website <https://cbs.gov.np/economic-census/> or <https://nada.cbs.gov.np/index.php/catalog/92> for accessing the economic census reports and data tables.

CBS and statistics offices issued the press release notes contained with major statistical findings. The mass media played the role in conveying the economic census results to the public in understandable mode. Mostly in all dissemination, the news agencies highlighted more on the economic composition by industry and registration status, focusing the concentration of concerning authorities.

iv. Discussion and Conclusion

In the context of adoption of federal structure and bearing responsibility to achieve SDGs in Nepal, there is a need of efficient and effective development plans and policy formulation from local to national level. Data and evidence can help contributing to informed decision making. CBS has increased responsibility to explore the possible data sources and fill the data gaps. Hence, the economic census was conducted in 2018 to fill the data gaps upto local levels. The Dissemination of timely census products is a key function that

2020 Asia–Pacific Statistics Week

A decade of action for the 2030 Agenda: Statistics that leaves no one and nowhere behind

15-19 JUNE 2020 | Bangkok, Thailand

enhances evidence-based decision making for sustainable development. CBS is successful in delivering the final results derived from economic census 2018 on timely to its users via hard copies or electronic copies. Similar to the practice of advertisement of the new market goods and services, the census data products should also be marketed to various potential users. Production of the reports and tables is not the end of census process but approaching to the potential users with census products only complete the census operation. From the perspective of right to information act 2007, the statistical updates also need to be informed to the public. The concept of decentralized dissemination seminars has been implemented through its district level statistics organization to approach the users with census products. This approach seems to be a necessary and effective ways to reach the remote users.

Basically, the dissemination seminars in decentralized way made informed the participated stakeholders about the various aspects like concept and methodology of economic census, the quantitative economic characteristics in comparative ways. Particularly, the official declaration of quantitative unregistered status of the establishments became the wonderful facts to the users which covered in the main news headings. Such dissemination event is the opportunity to be close with the users making statistically aware and get their cooperation in future statistical operations. If the users get clicked in mind with at least terminologies of economic census and major results, the users will have positive perspective on statistical operation which is the achievement of the dissemination mission. The live dissemination can create the multiplier effect because the participants informed with the census products will or may re-disseminate indirectly to other closed ones about the economic census products. Interactive dissemination events also make the users informed about the importance and utility of the data.

The decentralized dissemination event has been important with the aspects of knowing aspirations of diverse users, making literate, encouraging to utilize, getting to know the quality of data, getting cooperation, creating the trust on CBS data, raising the basic knowledge about statistics. Dissemination to different parts of the country is essential to understand the prevailing errors in the released data products. The users' feedback, comments and commitments are the important ingredients for the enhancement of statistical quality and its operation in the future. Conducting such dissemination seminars have demanded to reach at the sub district level, indicating the demand of statistical awareness.

In conclusion, informing the census products upto the local levels have become essential dissemination activities in promoting the utilization of data for evidence-based decision-making process in Nepal. The decentralized dissemination seminar is useful in enhancing the capacity of statistical officials at districts to cope with the local data users. It is equally important tasks of the data producing agencies to encourage the users to be engaged in maximum data utilization which develop the data use culture. A dissemination policy of CBS is the requirement to proceed for regular consistent dissemination activities, because the prevailing statistical legislations may not fulfill sufficiently.

I. References

- CBS. (2007). *Official Procedure Guideline*. CBS.
- CBS. (2017). *A Compendium of National Statistical System of Nepal*. Kathmandu, Nepal: CBS.
- CBS. (2019). *National Economic Census 2018, National Report No. 1-1 by Industry*. Kathmandu, NEPAL: CBS.
- CBS. (2019). *National Economic Census 2018 National Report by Province and District*. Kathmandu: CBS.
- CBS. (2019). *National Economic Census National Report 1-2 by size of persons engaged*. Kathmandu: CBS.
- CBS. (2019). *National Strategy for the Development of Statistical System*. Kathmandu: CBS.
- CBS. (2019). *Provincial Summary Report*. Kathmandu: CBS.
- IMF. (2004). In *Guide to the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS)*. International Monetary Fund.
- Nepal Law Commission. (2015). *Constitution of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission.
- Pradhan, M. C. (2017). APES WEEK 2017. In *Strengthening Statistical Infrastructure for Economic Statistics of Nepal: Prospects*. Bangkok, Thailand: UNESCAP.
- Pron, M. S. (2008). In *The Role of Statistics in Evidence-Based Policy Making*. UNECE.
- United Nations. (2001). *Handbook on Census Management for Population and Housing Censuses*. New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division.