

NSDS Guidelines update process and the Guidelines 2.3

The NSDS Guidelines 2.3

In order to better track the updates, the NSDS guidelines are numbered with versions and iterations, similarly to conventions used in the software industry; a change in the first number reflects a major update of the guidelines (as it was the case in 2014), and a change in the second number refers to a minor update. The year 2017 saw the 3rd update of the NSDS Guidelines 2.0 since 2014, the current Guidelines are thus titled “NSDS Guidelines 2.3”. In this iteration, new Chapters on “[Key Emerging issues for NSDSs](#)”, and on “[Data Dissemination](#)” have been added, while the Chapters on [Subnational Statistics](#), [Small Island Developing States](#), the [Advanced Data Planning Tool](#) (ADAPT), the [Data Revolution](#), the [2030 Agenda and the SDGs](#), and [Open Data](#) have been updated. In addition, recent Tools and Best Practices have been added, in particular recent NSDS documents, roadmaps and evaluations, as well as examples of statistical strategies in education and health, among others.

The NSDS Guidelines update process

PARIS21 developed the first NSDS Guidelines in 2004. Based upon a decade of experience in almost one hundred countries, the NSDS guidelines have been revisited in order to enhance and adapt the tool based on assessments made and the views of users and producers within the changing development context. On 2 April 2014, the NSDS guidelines 2.0 were officially launched at the PARIS21 Annual Meetings.

Since then, the NSDS Guidelines are updated on an annual basis, based on experience and feedback from users in all continents, changes in the international agenda, and new approaches and innovations developed by practitioners, with the aim to create a living document that is updated on a continuous basis to keep abreast with the changing global, regional and national environment. To answer this evolving context, and in order to monitor the evolution of the NSDS Guidelines in an efficient and structured manner, the PARIS21 Secretariat has established an [NSDS Guidelines Reference Group](#) with experts from countries and organisations from all regions. The updates approved by the Reference Group are included in the website each year in April.

Why NSDS guidelines annual updates?

Share good practices

Most of all the necessary elements for designing, implementing and managing the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) process were present in the previous guidelines. However, the structure of the document (organised in 10 chapters) was not always easy to handle since it was mainly theoretical and not always illustrated by concrete examples or good practices. By 2016, nearly 100 developing countries have gained considerable experience in the NSDS process, and every year new NSDSs are prepared, implemented, and evaluated. In addition new tools are developed to support countries in the preparation, costing, planning and evaluation of their NSDSs. The latest good practices

and the new tools are integrated and made accessible on this website.

Adapt to a changing context

The statistical “environment” is in constant evolution and a meaningful number of international statistical initiatives have a direct impact on the National Statistical System (NSS) strategic management. New norms and standards have been adopted while several international initiatives in the field of statistics are to be progressively taken into account by the NSS (the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, GDDS, SDDS, NQAF, DQAF, SNA 2008, IPC, Gender, Agricultural Global Strategy, SEEA, Data Revolution, Global Partnership on Sustainable Development Data, etc.). Not to mention also the evolving regional and national development agendas and new financial instruments for funding statistics. It should not be ignored that some countries are implementing a second or third strategy.

Respond to specific situations

Besides achieving a standard approach to the NSDS, there are other more specific situations to be dealt with: Regional Strategies (RSDS) to be articulated with several national ones, sectoral statistics strategies components of the national strategy, specific approaches for fragile states or small island states statistical systems, for federal states, or for subnational statistics relationship with national ones.

Flexibility

There is no intention here to propose a one size-fits-all conception of what the strategic management of the National Statistical System in developing countries ought to be, nor which strategies are the best. Strategic management is not new and existed before PARIS21 was created; the PARIS21 Secretariat proposed the NSDS approach to countries as a robust, holistic, participatory and country-owned process to formally decide what will be done during the next 4 to 5 years in order to ensure that better statistics and better analyses of these statistics are made available.

After more than 10 years, experience shows that the detailed content of successive NSDSs are very different from one country to another: NSDSs were designed to meet the problems of a given country at a given moment. However there are grounds to believe that, looking beyond socio-economic differences between countries, there is a common framework of overall consistency within which the decisions taken to lead national statistical development will fit: the scientific nature of the approach, the emphasis put on quality and satisfying needs, the dialogue with the users, the results-focused strategic planning approach, and sharing internationally agreed practices and recommendations.

Context

These guidelines are intended for use by people with a large variety of backgrounds, not all being national statisticians from the public sector; it is therefore important to describe in general terms what the scope is, what we talk about and so share a broad understanding of what is meant by statistics, development of statistical systems, and NSDS.

Official Statistics

Generally the term "statistics" means quantitative and qualitative, aggregated and representative information characterising a collective phenomenon in a considered population.

Official is used here for: as having state recognition; the OECD defines official statistics as statistics disseminated by the National Statistical System, excepting those that are explicitly stated not to be official. The UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics describes Official statistics as providing an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, serving the Government, the economy and the public with data about the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation. According to the UNFPOS, Official statistics, by definition, are produced by government agencies and can inform debate and decision making both by governments and by the wider community.

Statistics deemed to be official are therefore a component of a wider information system supporting a society's decision-making processes; one issue is then whether or not and how statistical information is labelled as official. Being official naturally implies that the statistical data respond to a collective need and are fit for purpose, satisfying as far as possible explicitly agreed upon quality standards for statistical production processes and outputs.

National Statistical System

According to the OECD, the National Statistical System (NSS) is the ensemble of statistical organisations and units within a country, that jointly collect, process and disseminate official statistics on behalf of national government. One might also include any statistics produced using any public money for or on behalf of the national government.

As a golden thread for official statistics one might consider: rule of law, good governance and accountability. Integrity, impartiality and accountability of the NSS are essential to honour citizens' entitlement to public information (official statistics are open data). In this respect the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics stress that:

- The laws, regulations and measures under which the statistical systems operate are to be made public.
- The statistical agencies need to decide according to strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics, on the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistical data.
- Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.

Centralized/decentralized National Statistical System

Institutional arrangements under which operates the NSS vary from one country to another as a result of the country's history and culture. There is a kind of continuum with at one end an NSS with a single institution responsible for most of the official statistics (centralised system) and at the other end (decentralised by sector) one national statistical agency and several other autonomous institutions dealing with specialised statistical fields (agriculture, education, labour, etc.); most of the time the Central Bank is an independent component of the NSS responsible for monetary and banking statistics as well as for balance of payments. In the case of federal states, in addition to having a centralised or decentralised (by sector) organisation at the federation level, there can be, at the member states level, an autonomous statistical organisation (regional decentralisation) producing official statistics for regional needs.

To achieve consistency and efficiency in the statistical system, harmonisation of released official statistics and coordination of the various statistical activities are a permanent concern and require adequate and often changing institutional arrangements tailored to the national political organisation. The need for a permanent statutory independence from government has led some countries to establish an overall and specific authority on the whole statistical system reporting to Parliament; in the case of small countries, this authority is often vested into the head of the central statistical office. Formalising the relations of the various NSS components with international organisations is often a legal responsibility of the Head of the National Statistical Office (NSO).

When to develop or update an NSDS

Since the NSDS process was first proposed, nearly all countries concerned have designed and implemented at least one NSDS; some are even running their third. Although this does not modify the overall logic of the originally proposed process, the changes that have been introduced must be contextualised if only because a previous round was completed. As an illustration, when designing a second NSDS, the final evaluation report of the first serves as an assessment report for the second. Also, often with minor adjustments, the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, the mission and vision statements are carried over. Time devoted to acknowledging, understanding and preparing activities is dramatically shortened and this allows for more time to focus on strategic issues and goals and reduces the overall time to achieve the design. It is likely that the national strategic management capability has somehow been improved as a result of implementing the previous NSDS.

Regarding the next NSDS, a first issue relates to when should a new NSDS be prepared.

a) NSDSs and development strategies: The NSDS approach insists on the key role that statistics ought to play in any development process. The efforts made to upgrade the status of statistics and to establish them as one of the priorities in this process imply that a close articulation between development plans and NSDS is crucial. It means that a new NSDS should be prepared along with every new development strategy. It should reflect the data needs resulting from the strategy and from its objectives, and allow an appropriate monitoring and evaluation process to take place. Development plans and NSDSs are complementary tools and they should cover the same period of time.

Any major revision of the development strategy should trigger a revision of the NSDS. This may occur for instance when a mid-term review of the development plan takes place and leads to changes in the strategy and the objectives.

A mid-term review of the NSDS itself may lead to a revision of the document to take into account the findings of the evaluation. If the gap between objectives and outputs is

important, due, for instance, to funding constraints, a revision of the NSDS should take place.

b) NSDSs and global or regional development strategies: Important international or regional initiatives may impact significantly on the national development strategies. The 2030 Agenda focuses on sustainability of development worldwide and introduces new dimensions in the development process. This ought to be reflected in the national development strategies and requires a close monitoring and evaluation process. It means that a new NSDS should be prepared in most countries or that an important revision is due. See “[Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)”. A new Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics (RSDS) can also imply the elaboration of a new NSDS of the revision of the current NSDS – see the section “[Regional Strategies for the Development of Statistics](#)”.

c) NSDSs and crisis: A number of countries are at risk of catastrophes or crisis that will impact on the development process. A new development strategy will be prepared to take into account the impact of the crisis. It should lead to the preparation of a new NSDS.

As the connections between development strategies and statistical systems are so close, it means that when a new development strategy is adopted, a new or revised NSDS should be prepared and closely reflect the changes that took place.

General approach / specific cases

There is no intention to go beyond the presentation of a generic process for designing another NSDS. The general process is considered robust enough. The participatory approach, the likely provision of knowledgeable support by donors and the experience gained facilitates the adoption of proper strategies, including some specific situations.

NSDS design Process v/s NSDS

It has often been observed that many effectively formulated strategies fail because they are not successfully implemented and it was concluded that “the ability to execute a strategy is more important than the quality of the strategy itself”. Hence it is of primary importance that those who will execute the strategy, design and fully own it; the quality of the design process is then another key condition for success. As a consequence, it was not felt appropriate that these guidelines recommend any good or best practices in organising or managing NSSs.

Still, when contextually relevant, items from the Documents repository have been systematically referenced at the bottom of each page according to the nature of their content: tools, norms or good practices.

Current members are Albania, Burundi, Ecuador, Grenada, Palestine, Philippines, Samoa, African Development Bank, AFRISTAT, CARICOM, Pacific Community, UNESCAP, and UNESCWA. The Group co-chaired by Statistics Canada and PARIS21.

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