



# LESSONS NOTE

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## **STRENGTHENING NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA - SOME LESSONS FROM UGANDAN EXPERIENCE**

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Lessons Notes report on best and replicable or avoidable practices in capacity building and development management by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), its grantees and partner institutions that undertake capacity building activities. The Notes are contributed by operations staff of the Foundation, its Technical Advisory Panels and Networks, beneficiaries of its support and partner institutions, and published periodically by the Knowledge Management and Program Support Department. Lessons Notes are essentially the views of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Foundation.

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# STRENGTHENING NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA - SOME LESSONS FROM UGANDAN EXPERIENCE<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is now recognized internationally as home truth that better statistics are an essential part of an enabling environment for development. Better statistics do (or should) lead to better policies and development outcomes. The World Bank's 2004 World Development Report (Making Services Available to the Poor) places strong emphasis on the role better information systems can play in improving the quality of services to the poor - as a stimulant to public action, a catalyst for change and an input into making other reforms work. However, according to a PARIS21 (Partnerships in Statistics for Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century) pamphlet, "*in many of the poorest countries, statistics are weak and policy-makers seldom use them, leading to poor decisions and poor outcomes*". Indeed in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, National Statistical Systems (NSSs) are trapped in a vicious cycle of statistical under-development where limited statistical awareness and limited appreciation of statistics by policy and decision-makers at different levels and across society has led to sustained under-funding for statistics. This has in turn led to limited organizational and institutional development, which in turn has led to under-performance of statistical agencies - limited statistical outputs and services in terms of quantity, scope, type and quality. Under-performance has in turn led to less demand for statistics and minimal resource allocation for their production.

However, in recent past, African countries have signed up to the new focus on managing for development results or results agenda which involves "*focusing on performance and the achievement of outputs, outcomes and impact*". The results agenda includes sectoral development plans, Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs), other national development policies and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The results agenda is "*data intensive*". Not only has the development agenda placed new demands on already weak and vulnerable NSSs but also, it has given much needed impetus for statistical reforms and development of statistical capacity to break out of the aforementioned vicious cycle. This paper highlights the cutting-edge statistical reforms undertaken in Uganda in late 1990s and fairly effective strategies the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (the Bureau) has used to improve national statistics. Lessons from the Ugandan experience may be of interest to other countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Ben Paul Mungyereza from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics assisted in editing these notes. I am grateful to both of them.

## **2. FROM UNDER-PERFORMANCE TO CUTTING-EDGE STATISTICAL REFORMS**

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Uganda, like many other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, experienced precipitous decline in statistical production caused mainly by political turmoil and mismanagement. The capacity for data production got so badly degraded that it became extremely difficult to meet the basic needs of key data users. For instance, production of some data series ceased altogether, the quality of all continuing data series declined between 1970 and 1987, there were glaring data gaps on important development indicators and the statistical system could not respond to new development challenges, among them, HIV/AIDS, energy, environment, governance, etc. Statistics was on the back burner and very much lacked visibility.

As the new government that came to power in 1986 embarked on a major economic and institutional reform agenda and process, it realized that good statistics would be needed to support the reforms and policies as well as their implementation and to monitor and measure progress. Indeed the said reform agenda and process created a huge demand for statistics that was going to be impossible to meet in a meaningful way unless drastic steps were taken to improve the national statistical infrastructure and capacity to deliver good statistics. Starting from 1987, the government took several measures to rehabilitate the national statistical infrastructure, revive statistical production and build confidence in official statistics again. During the rehabilitation and revival phase, government, with support of various development partners, provided funding to extensively rehabilitate the offices of the then Department of Statistics (in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development) and to enable the Department to undertake various activities to update and collect data on a wide range of economic, social and demographic indicators to meet pressing data needs, and to improve on the methodology, timeliness, accuracy and scope of national statistics such as national accounts.

In addition, other players in the NSS including line Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) were also assisted to improve their statistical operations. In particular, the Ministry of Health established a Health Management Information System, the Ministry of Education established an Education Management Information System, the National Environment Information Centre was established, there was timely production of Financial Statistics by the Central Bank, and compilation of the Balance of Payments estimates and the External Trade Statistics by both the Central Bank and the Uganda Revenue Authority in collaboration with the then Department of Statistics, etc.

In spite of these measures and efforts, national statistics remained weak. For example, there was limited availability and use of household survey data, data user-producer consultations remained weak, data were generated almost exclusively for government and a few development partners, there was virtually no collaboration between the Bureau and research institutions, there was limited analysis of household and other data, access to existing data was limited and the focus for data production was on macroeconomic indicators<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *James Muwonge, The Role of Household Surveys in Poverty reduction Efforts: A Case of the Uganda National Household Survey Programme, African Statistical Journal, Volume 3, 2006.*

In order to accelerate statistical development in the country, government undertook in mid-1990s far-reaching and cutting-edge statistical reforms by transforming the then Department of Statistics into a semi-autonomous, lean and highly professional government statistical agency, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, to oversee and improve the management of the NSS to provide reliable, consistent, accurate and timely data for policy formulation and planning. The Bureau has a small, technocratic, highly-focused and hands-on Board of Directors as its governing body. The Board has well-defined functions which include, among others, protecting and promoting the integrity of official statistics; appointment and promotion of staff; approving the terms and conditions of service for staff, the work programme and budget; periodically reviewing the structure of the Bureau; etc.

The membership of the Board includes high-level professionals that include a Chairperson and five other members representing key stakeholder constituencies - the parent ministry (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development), private sector, civil society sector and the Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (Makerere University). The Board is appointed by the Minister of the parent ministry and endorsed by the Cabinet. The Chief Executive Officer of the Bureau, the Executive Director, is appointed by the Minister on the recommendation of the Board. On appointment, the Executive Director becomes a full member of the Board. The Statistics Act establishing the Board does not provide for any member of the Board to send a representative to any meeting except the Executive Director. This has maintained continuity in the work of the Board.

The aforementioned statistical reforms aimed to enhance the credibility and probity of official statistics by keeping at arms length political or other forms of external interference in the running of the Bureau and to make provision of official statistics more effective and efficient. In addition, government undertook to support the development of statistics in the country by, among other things:

- using statistics extensively in evidence-based macro-economic management and policy making especially in the implementation and monitoring of poverty-reduction programmes;
- building of statistical components in important national development programmes and projects;
- raising the profile of statistics and making statistical production one of the priorities of government;
- providing necessary resources to make provision of statistical data and services more effective and responsive to user needs (e.g. Government funded the greater part of the 2002 Population and Housing Census);
- including the core statistical activities of the Bureau under the Poverty Action Fund (PAF) (protected budget line against cuts); and
- attracting donor funding to relocate the Bureau from Entebbe to Kampala (some 43 kms away), close to the users of statistical products and services.

### **3. STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING STATISTICAL DEVELOPMENT**

The above activities were basically government-led. In the last seven years of its existence, the Bureau has developed mutually-supportive strategies and taken a number of actions to promote the development of statistics and their use especially for evidence-based policy and

decision-making in the country. Some of these strategies and actions hold lessons for other countries in the African region. These strategies and actions include:

- ensuring credibility and transparency of official statistics,
- designing and implementing a consistent advocacy programme,
- staying relevant to national policy-making processes,
- broadening and deepening coordination, collaboration and networking,
- production of more innovative information products,
- developing a Plan for National Statistical Development, and
- creating a conducive work environment for the Bureau staff.

### **3.1 Ensuring credibility and transparency of official statistics**

Statistics will not be used unless they are perceived to be sufficiently credible and transparent. The Board took this to be its primary mission and accordingly, the following were put in place or developed to enhance the credibility and transparency of official statistics:

- meritocratic procedures for staff recruitment, development, motivation, empowerment and performance, and applying them consistently;
- competitive staff terms and conditions of service;
- employment of a cadre of highly qualified and skilled staff;
- a system that encourages staff to raise their sights, to innovate and to release their creative energies and realize their full potential; one that redefines and promotes a culture of performance, of team work and of information sharing;
- a culture of data quality that emphasizes application of international standards, methodologies and best practices across the NSS;
- providing the Chief Executive Officer full professional independence in running the Bureau and cushioning him against any pernicious interference especially from politicians;
- advance publication of a release calendar consistent with the provisions of the IMF General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) and simultaneous release of data (e.g. each month, the Consumer Price Index for that month is released to stakeholders simultaneously at a press conference convened at 11.00 a.m on the last working day of each month).

The Uganda government has on different occasions questioned the validity of some official statistics produced by UBOS. What is interesting though is that this has happened both when it liked and disliked the results. In the former case, the poverty level had fallen from 56% in 1992 to 44% in 1997 and in the latter case, it had risen from 35% in 2001 to 38% in 2003. In both cases, the Bureau stuck to its results which, fortunately, were co-owned by other stakeholders who had collaborated with it in the analysis of survey datasets.

### **3.2 Designing and implementing a consistent statistical advocacy programme**

To break out of the aforementioned vicious cycle, the Bureau designed and is implementing on a continuing basis, a huge and consistent statistical advocacy programme. Statistical advocacy aims to proactively: create statistical awareness and make a compelling case for statistics; increase demand for statistics by demonstrating their use in policy and decision-

making; and mobilize resources for statistical production. The advocacy programme includes the following actions, among others:

### *Identifying and/or cultivating “Champions” for statistical development*

The Bureau has successfully identified and/or cultivated “champions” among political leaders and senior government officials (key policy and decision-makers) as well as development partners to champion statistical development in the country without jeopardizing the lofty goal of ensuring credibility and transparency of official statistics. As a result, the demand for better statistics is being articulated not only by statisticians but also at the highest political and policy levels as well as by development partners. Those who have been identified or cultivated to champion statistics in Uganda include the President of the country, the Head of Public Service and Secretary to the Cabinet, the Governor of the Central Bank, the Secretary to the Treasury and Permanent Secretaries in line ministries.

### *Use of news makers*

Use of news makers can be an effective way to advocate for statistics. News makers include top government officials e.g. the President, Vice President, the Prime Minister, Governor of the Central Bank, Permanent Secretaries, etc. At the Bureau, we have used news makers to raise the profile of statistics and statistical events. Whenever a statistical event is organized, management of the Bureau is under instructions from the Board to get a news maker to grace it by opening or closing it. When that happens, the event becomes news and it is extensively reported in the news media – radio, television and newspapers. The Board came up with this strategy after realizing that when lesser mortals such as the Chairperson of the Board or the Chief Executive Officer of the Bureau grace workshops and other occasions, these become non-events as they get little reporting in the media (if at all).

### *Cultivating and partnering with the news media*

The Bureau recognizes the important role the news media - radio, television, newspapers, etc - can play in the development of national statistics. Use of the news media has the advantage that many people can be reached fairly easily and cheaply. Accordingly, the Bureau has taken a number of steps to cultivate and partner with the news media in pursuit of national statistical development. It has organized several workshops for media practitioners to empower them to appreciate statistics, make sense of key statistical indicators and use statistics in their work. These workshops have also made it possible for the media to understand who collects which statistics, how statistics are collected and managed, and who uses statistics, why they are used and how they are used. The interaction between the news media and the Bureau has also helped the Bureau staff to improve the way they communicate with the outside world.

### *Celebrating Africa Statistics Week*

The Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s which was adopted in 1992 by the 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of African Ministers responsible for Economic Planning and Development, set aside the 18<sup>th</sup> of November as Africa Statistics Day to be celebrated each year in order to “increase public awareness about the important role which

*statistics play in all aspects of social and economic life*"<sup>3</sup>. The evaluation of statistical development in Africa undertaken in 2000 showed that many countries do not celebrate this day.

In Uganda, a decision was taken by the Board in 2000 to extend the length of the celebrations from one day to a week in order to achieve maximum impact. That year, the Bureau hosted the President of Uganda as Chief Celebrant. During the week, many activities are usually carried out including radio and TV discussions, publication of articles on statistical themes in newspapers, holding data user-producer workshops on different themes, holding a media workshop, display of various databases e.g. UgandaInfo (a database with key development indicators and data) and various sectoral databases (e.g. on education, health, etc.).

### *Staying relevant to policy making processes*

The Bureau was established at a time when NSSs tended to be supply-driven rather than demand-driven, leading to failure of the systems to adequately respond to user needs, generate more demand for statistics and attract more funding for data production. The Bureau has encouraged key stakeholders to play greater and more pro-active role in the development of the national statistics. In particular, it has encouraged effective dialogue with key data users and ensured that key policy and decision-makers are kept in the loop and fully engaged to make national statistics policy relevant.

This can best be illustrated by the Uganda National Household Survey Programme (UNHS) which was originally designed as discrete surveys to provide data to monitor the effects of social dimensions of structural adjustment. These evolved into a multi-year and multi-round integrated household survey programme (with different modules) to monitor and measure poverty levels and their trends following the establishment of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) (Uganda's version of the PRSP) in 1997. The UNHS has given impetus to consultations between the Bureau and government officials, development partners and other stakeholders; built capacity in data collection and management; led to establishment of collaboration between the Bureau and research institutions; and produced household time series data covering over 10 years for measuring trend in poverty. It is acknowledged that the data from UNHS have become an essential input into policy debate, analysis and choice as well as evidence-based policies and programmes especially those related to wealth creation and poverty reduction. In particular, the data have been used extensively in the review of the PEAP every four years and in the preparation of bi-annual Poverty Status Reports (PSRs).

### **3.3 Broadening and deepening coordination, collaboration, networking and information sharing**

Coordination/collaboration is the overarching strategy of the Bureau for statistical capacity building and developing the NSS in the country. This strategy is based on the realization that all data producing agencies in the country, including the Bureau itself, are young, weak and vulnerable and need coordination, collaboration and information sharing for mutual support and to achieve synergy.

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<sup>3</sup> *Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1992.*

While the Bureau has been successful in fostering coordination and information sharing internally, it has had varying degrees of success in fostering coordination, collaboration, networking and information sharing across the NSS. The following arrangements are in place to enhance coordination, collaboration, networking and information sharing.

### Directorate of Coordination services

Internal coordination and information sharing within the Bureau and between the Bureau and other stakeholder agencies was boosted by the establishment of the Directorate of Coordination Services. The Directorate is multi-disciplinary with a statistician, economists, sociologists and a communications expert. These hold positions from officer to Director and are highly placed to undertake high level responsibilities.

The following have been put in place by the Directorate to enhance internal coordination and information sharing:

- *Coordination Review*: Since 2002, the Directorate has been producing this Review on a quarterly basis. The Review summarizes the Bureau's activities undertaken in each quarter. The Review which is shared with all members of Staff and the Board has enabled staff and the members of the Board to know what is going on across the Bureau.
- *Compendium of Concepts, Definitions and Classifications*: The Directorate put together a Compendium of Main Concepts, Definitions and Classifications in close collaboration with MDAs. This Compendium is used as a tool for technical coordination in the day-to-day work of various Directorates of the Bureau and across MDAs.
- *Newsletter*: Since 2001, the Bureau has been publishing a Newsletter bi-annually. The Newsletter which is widely distributed to key stakeholders within and outside Uganda, contains information about ongoing and planned activities not only at the Bureau but also throughout the NSS. The newsletter has contributed to the promotion and strengthening of internal coordination. It has also boosted the Bureau's corporate image and led to improvement of the Bureau staff capacity to write and explain statistical activities and findings in a user- friendly and non-technical manner for the benefit of the public.
- *Professional seminars*: The Bureau started a programme of professional seminars in 2003 to serve as fora for enhancing discussion on topical issues, the professional exchange of experiences, the discussion of common problems and for the development of new insights and solutions to problems of statistical production. The staff of the Bureau, advisors at the Bureau and experts in areas of interest to Bureau staff are invited to make presentations on different subjects. All professional staff of the Bureau are encouraged to attend the seminars and to make presentations. These seminars have also been used as a platform for pre-dissemination of survey findings prior to external dissemination. The seminars have led to improved sharing of information about the Bureau and statistical development in general, skills development among staff in preparation and presentation of professional papers, etc.



- *Statistics Week Celebrations:* Coordination and information sharing have been further strengthened through Africa Statistics Week celebrations in which various stakeholders actively participate.

## **Local Area Network**

The internal coordination of the Bureau has also been facilitated by the establishment of a Local Area Network (LAN) as part of its IT Strategy Implementation. The LAN has led to:

### *Interlinked statistical production*

With exception of field collection that is still manual, the remaining processes through data management to dissemination are managed on the same platform with the same resources e.g. software applications, printers, etc. Also unlike in pre-LAN time when each Directorate or Section of the Bureau did its own business in isolation, there is now more coordinated production of statistics; there are now more shared experiences and efforts in any single production i.e. comments, discussions and debates on any statistical production. This will be extended after the development of the extranet.

### *Sharing and storage of data*

The LAN and design of IT usage policy has reduced holding individual datasets and facilitated centralized management of backups and archiving to ensure safety of data. Now files are easily shared by all those with exclusive rights. There is no more need for mobile media (floppy disks) for data exchange.

### *Cost effective platform for sharing of resources and information*

The LAN has become a cost effective platform for sharing of resources and information. Sharing files, reports and other literature has become easier. There is less need of paper and ink that was a hindrance to information sharing. Also there are now more editors of statistics or reports than was possible before. Challenges and issues are now well debated. This has improved coordination of the various activities and processes and in many cases reduced duplication of effort or better more improved products and services.

## **Data Producer Committees**

In order to link the internal and external coordination, Data Producer Committees were set up along the Bureau Directorates to identify, establish and strengthen linkages for sharing statistical data amongst stakeholders; establish, compile and share standard data collection and analysis methodologies; identify data gaps and possible opportunities to fill them; and promote capacity building in collaborating institutions. Each Directorate, therefore, has a corresponding committee of which it provides the Secretariat. The chair for the committee is rotated among the stakeholder institutions. The MDAs that form the committees are not only data producers but also data users. The contact persons within these MDAs have become major connecting points for sharing information that exists in these MDAs. The Communications Expert has helped to link up the Bureau with media houses and to develop more user-friendly dissemination materials.

In order to spread the coordination to the sub-region, the producer committees were linked to the East African Community Technical Working Groups on Statistics through using the same contact persons.

### **Coordination between data users and producers**

Coordination between data producers and users is essential for advancing "common understanding of policy issues and related data requirements, setting data priorities, clarifying the objectives for data collection and agreeing on the best methods for collecting data" (UN Statistical Office, 1991). A few of these Committees have been established such as the National Agricultural Statistics Technical Committee and the Balance of Payments Committee. These Committees meet as and when there is business to handle.

The greatest challenge faced with data user-producer committees is lack of commitment expressed in form of non-attendance of meetings.

### **Coordination between the Bureau and training institutions**

The Bureau has established good working relationships with training institutions. The Regional Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (ISAE) at Makerere University is represented on the Board of Directors of the Bureau. The staff of the Institute participate in the design of the Bureau's various data collections and especially in the design of appropriate methodologies as well as in data analysis. The Bureau on the other hand is represented on the Advisory Council of the Institute. It, therefore, has a voice in what is taught at the Institute and how it is taught. In addition, the staff of the Bureau are encouraged to participate in the teaching of practical courses offered by the Institute.

A good number of public Universities have been established in different parts of the country in recent past. The Bureau has entered into a collaboration arrangement with seven (7) of these Universities to strengthen capacities of district officials and other stakeholders through targeted training in order to improve their performance in collecting, managing and using data for decision-making. In addition, District Planning Units are being assisted to analyze and package the available information (e.g. by producing district profiles based on Population and Housing Census data) to facilitate the planning processes within districts.

### **Collaboration between the Bureau and research institutions/agencies**

In order to add value to datasets at the Bureau and also in order to improve data analysis and meet the expectations of policy makers and other data users, the Bureau has entered into collaboration arrangements with research institutions including:

- The Economic Policy Research Centre which works with the Bureau to generate poverty estimates from UNHS and carry out other policy related research. EPRC offers independent policy advice to government;
- Makerere University Institute for Social Research for joint research using Bureau datasets;
- The Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Unit at the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development; and
- The Gender Department in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

Collaboration with these and other institutions has added value to the data the Bureau produces to better inform policy.

### **Statistics-donor coordination**

In 2003, the Bureau established an informal forum with development partners who have an interest in statistics. The terms of reference for the forum are to:

- explore and create synergies in donor support to statistical development and production,
- reduce transaction costs for both government and development partners, and
- contribute to adequate focus/priority being put on statistical development in Ugandan policies and budgets.

Regular bi-annual meetings of the forum are held. In addition, additional topical meetings are held according to need (in the initial setting up period more regular meetings were necessary). DFID was responsible for co-ordination and meeting facilities for the first year. Facilitation of meetings rotates among development partners annually.

During the meetings, there is exchange of information on donor and government priorities and programmes/activities on statistics (regular update, with a holistic view also to cross-sectoral issues), and ongoing policy discussions and budget processes including mechanisms for basket funding arrangements and joint donor reviews.

## **3.4 Improved data analysis and production of more innovative products**

### ***Improving data analysis and reporting***

Perhaps the best way to advocate for statistics is to produce understandable statistics users need, when they need them and how they need them. It has been observed that non-effective use of statistics in a number of developing countries can be attributed to poor data analysis, presentation and reporting. Generally, NSOs tend to do basic data analysis and produce statistical reports. This is good but not sufficient from the point of view of informing policy design and analysis. More detailed data analysis and especially policy-related analysis is required to establish relationships among various variables and to illuminate policy issues. Detailed and policy-relevant data analysis should be undertaken by those people with intense subject-matter knowledge e.g. on gender, poverty, environment, agronomy, crop husbandry, trade etc, as well as good knowledge of policy issues and national policy direction.

The Board of Directors realized that the Bureau did not have this kind of subject knowledge. So it encouraged the Bureau management to establish strong collaboration arrangements with researchers and research institutions which are endowed with policy-related analytical capacity. As was mentioned in section 3.3 above, special relationships have been in vogue between the Bureau and the Economic Policy Research Centre and the Makerere Institute for Social research (both based at Makerere University); the Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Unit in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development; and Gender Department in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

### *Production of more innovative products*

It is also important to mention that user needs can be better met by production of more innovative products. The Bureau has developed the capacity to use Geographical Information System (GIS) functionality. Under a collaboration arrangement with the International Livestock Research Institute based in Nairobi, poverty maps have been developed through integrating information from heterogeneous sources including censuses and surveys. This innovation has produced high value products (poverty maps) which show, among other things:

- the distribution of poverty across districts and help to capture heterogeneity within districts;
- identify geographical factors affecting poverty;
- improve targeting of resources and interventions; and
- improve communication about poverty conditions

The Bureau is in the process of developing constituency poverty maps for Members of Parliament as yet another advocacy tool. Other innovative products include thematic reports that give policy advice to government on various subjects. These reports are produced by the said research institutions.

### **3.5 Data timeliness and release**

#### *Data timeliness*

Lack of timeliness is one of the main weaknesses of official statistics in Africa. In order to ensure that users get data in a timely manner, the Board set strict data release policies which are consistent with GDDS provisions. For instance, survey data have to be released within 6 months after completion of field work, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for any month has to be released on the last working day of that month, etc.

#### *Data release*

It is the view of the Board that data by themselves have no intrinsic value. Their value is extrinsic and derives from the fact that they can reach those who need them, can be easily understood and can be actually used. This view led to the development of a liberal policy on data release and access, including microdata. Under this policy, all serious researchers including academia, students and, of course, research institutions can access datasets held by the Bureau after they have been anonymized to protect the confidentiality of data suppliers. The view of the Board is that the only way to justify the high cost of data collection at public expense is to have the data analyzed many times and then used.

### 3.6 Designing the Plan for National Statistical Development

Half way into the implementation of the Corporate Plan for the Bureau (2002-2007), it was realized that:

- development of institutional capacities in the NSS was becoming increasingly uneven, and by and large Bureau-centric;
- capacity gaps among data producers was increasing rather than decreasing;
- the quality of administrative data still left a lot to be desired; and
- there was limited use of administrative data as official statistics due in part to the generalized perception that they are of poor quality.

There was, therefore, a felt need to design a medium-term comprehensive and coherent framework to, *inter alia*, address issues of data limitations; harness, rationalize and prioritise the use of resources (both national and international) for statistical development; integrate statistics within national policy processes; introduce modern management principles in the management of national statistics; and manage change. To respond to this need, UBOS provided leadership in the design of a Plan for National Statistical Development (PNSD) covering the period 2006/7-2010/11.

The PNSD was developed in an inclusive and participatory manner with the involvement of key stakeholders right from the start. These include institutions in the public sector (MDAs), private sector, civil society sector, research, academia and development partners. The PNSD takes into account all national, regional and international data needs. In particular, it is anchored in the PEAP and the MDGs. It also encompasses production, analysis and use of data and addresses related issues; involves all statistical production units, serves as a framework for various sectors, serves as coherent framework for international and bilateral assistance; integrates existing activities, and draws on past experiences of other countries; and conforms to international standards, including those related to data quality. One unique feature of the PNSD is the way it mainstreams sectoral issues and concerns by using Sector Strategic Plans for Statistics as its building blocks.

### 3.7 Building a Statistics House



**Statistics House**

It is known that organizational effectiveness can be enhanced if staff work in a safe and healthy environment that is conducive to serious work. When the Bureau was established, it took over the assets of the former Department of Statistics including old office buildings located in Entebbe away from Kampala, the capital city and away from the main users of the products of the Bureau. However, in the last two years, government raised funds and built an 8-storeyed state-of-the-art home (the Statistics House) for the Bureau. Statistics House has raised the profile of statistics, donned the skyline of Kampala and has become yet another landmark in the city. This state-of-the-art complex is the most

visible expression yet of government commitment to statistical development in the country. It has also given impetus to the advocacy drive for statistics.

It is also interesting to mention that during the Presidential and Parliamentary elections held early this year, three workers from Statistics House became Members of Parliament. In addition, the Head of the Uganda Computer Services, which occupies a floor in Statistics House was appointed Minister for ICT. Statistics House is, therefore, very well represented in Parliament and the cabinet.

## **4. KEY LESSONS**

There are some lessons other African countries can learn from the Uganda's experience in statistical organization and management. Key among them are the following:

### **4.1 Autonomy of the National Statistical Office**

Making the NSO an autonomous government agency enhances its visibility and enhances the public confidence in official statistics. Autonomy is not about making the NSO self-financing; rather it is about making provision of official statistics more credible, effective and efficient. Making the NSO an autonomous agency involves de-linking the NSO from government and entrusting it to a Governing Board with delegated responsibility for overseeing its work and general development of official statistics in the country.

### **4.2 Leadership role of the Board**

The Governing Board of the autonomous agency should be small, focused and composed of high-level professionals in statistics and related fields. Members should represent key national stakeholder constituencies like government (finance and/or planning ministry), the private sector, the civil society sector and research and training institutions. The primary responsibility of the Board should be to promote and preserve the professional independence and administrative autonomy of the agency as well as enhancing its professionalism.

### **4.3 Advocacy**

In most Sub-Saharan countries, statistical awareness is generally low at every level in society. This has in part contributed to the vicious cycle of statistical under-development and under-performance. It is, therefore, important to design and implement a consistent advocacy programme for statistics in each country to break this cycle. Identifying high-level policy and decision makers as well as development partners to champion statistical development will give a boost to the advocacy programme. Newsmakers and news media should also be used to great effect in support of statistical advocacy.

### **4.4 Coordination, collaboration, networking and information sharing**

Broadening and deepening coordination, collaboration, networking and information sharing among stakeholders in the NSS often leads to synergy and avoids working at cross-purpose, duplication of efforts and production of conflicting data. One greatest challenge with data user-producer committees is commitment. They usually start off strong but with time,

interest goes down. The onus is on the NSO to make sure that the right people are appointed to these committees, that invitations to meetings are sent out in good time and that the agenda for meetings are sufficiently interesting.

#### **4.5 Staff recruitment, development and motivation**

To be effective, the NSO should set high standards for staff recruitment and development. In particular, the process of staff recruitment and promotion should not be externally influenced and should in all cases be based on merit. Given the range of subjects and activities carried out by a modern NSO, a variety of skills, talents, academic backgrounds and work experience will be required for the office to function effectively. It should also be mentioned that putting in place a well defined career path and an attractive incentives structure can lead to recruitment of highly qualified and skilled professionals and their retention.

#### **4.6 Conducive management style**

The effectiveness of staff will also be enhanced by the implementation of a conducive management style. Building bureaucracy, autocracy and top-down management styles should as much as possible be avoided in preference for a streamlined, participatory and co-ordinated style of management that breaks down organisational silos and encourages cross-functional and problem-solving teamwork. The management style should encourage staff to innovate, release their creative energies and realize their full potential; should promote a culture of performance, of teamwork and of information sharing.

#### **4.7 Improved data analysis, access and release**

It is essential to make statistics less pedantic and inflexible and more user-friendly, accessible and usable. Improved data analysis including production of innovative statistical products should be done to add value to datasets. This will require that the NSO in each country collaborates closely with researchers, subject-matter specialists and research-based institutions. This in turn will require making datasets more accessible to serious data users. There will also be a need for releasing data in a more timely manner.

#### **4.8 Statistical planning**

For the NSO to effectively lead and coordinate the NSS, it should be well resourced, structured and have necessary technical capacity to lead and coordinate. Among other things, it should provide leadership to the process of designing and implementing a national statistical plan that covers all data users and sectors. The plan should be anchored in the national development plan such as the PRSP so that statistical activities are given priority in resource allocation. The plan should comply with the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and be based on the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) principles, which have been developed by PARIS21 in collaboration with partners.

#### **4.8 Work environment**

The work environment including hospitable offices can also contribute to the effectiveness of staff and raise the profile of statistics in the country. Providing a befitting building for the

NSO in an appropriate location can be seen as a sign of the commitment of government to statistical development.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

It is possible for Sub-Saharan countries to reverse the decline in their statistical production and get firmly started on the process of national statistical development. This, however, will require far reaching statistical reforms e.g. making the National Statistical Office an autonomous government agency. The reforms are being triggered in the countries by the new upsurge in demand for statistical data to inform national and international development agenda and also by well-designed statistical advocacy work. These reforms should restructure, resource and reposition the National Statistical Offices to enable them to provide leadership to and coordinate National Statistical Systems.

The reforms, however, need to be accompanied by implementation of mutually supportive strategies to build national capacity and improve national statistics. Some of these strategies may include: statistical advocacy; coordination, collaboration, networking and information sharing; staff recruitment, development and motivation; improving data analysis, access and release; conducive management style; national statistical planning; and improving the work environment for the National Statistical Office.

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## CONTRIBUTIONS TO LESSONS NOTES

As part of its knowledge management program, the African Capacity Building Foundation encourages contribution of Lessons Notes by its professional staff members of its Technical Advisory Panels and Networks, beneficiaries of its interventions and partner institutions. Issues and questions relating to this Lessons Note should be addressed to the contributor:

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## LESSONS NOTES

As part of its knowledge management program, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) produces Lessons Notes on recent experiences in capacity building and development management in the Foundation's six core competency areas:

- *Economic Policy Analysis and Management*
- *Financial Management and Accountability*
- *Strengthening and Monitoring National Statistics and Statistical Systems*
- *Public Administration and Management*
- *Strengthening of Policy Analysis Capacity of National Parliaments*
- *Professionalization of the Voices of the Private Sector and Civil Society*

The Lessons Notes are widely circulated among development partners in the public sector, private sector, civil society as well as in the academic, development management and the donor communities with the aim of raising awareness of best practices and potential pitfalls in interventions in capacity building and development policies and programs in Africa and strengthening dialogue, exchanges and collaboration amongst partner institutions in the field of capacity building. Essentially, Lessons Notes document and maintain a valuable database on lessons learned in capacity building in Africa.

ACBF welcomes contributions from all development partners, policy analysts and practitioners as well as capacity building institutions, which should be addressed to:

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