

7 Elaborating action plans

Elaborating Action Plans is an important step to prepare the implementation of a strategy for the development of statistics. The strategy defined in the NSDS needs to be translated into an action plan, which sets out more precisely what needs to be done, by whom, when and at what cost. The action plans should be organised along the strategic objectives, outcomes and outputs which will be achieved. They should include a budget, a financing plan and a M&E process (see [ESSENCIAL STEPS](#)).

The definition of a strategy, reflecting the vision prevailing among the stakeholders, is not sufficient to implement the strategy. The implementation of a strategy starts with its objectives. Each objective aims at an impact which translates into an outcome. The outcome, in turn, requires the production of outputs. Action plans show the activities needed to deliver the desired outputs. As mentioned in the previous chapter: “successful achievement of the strategic goals will depend on well-thought-out mid-term and long-term strategies, broken down into activities/action plans”.

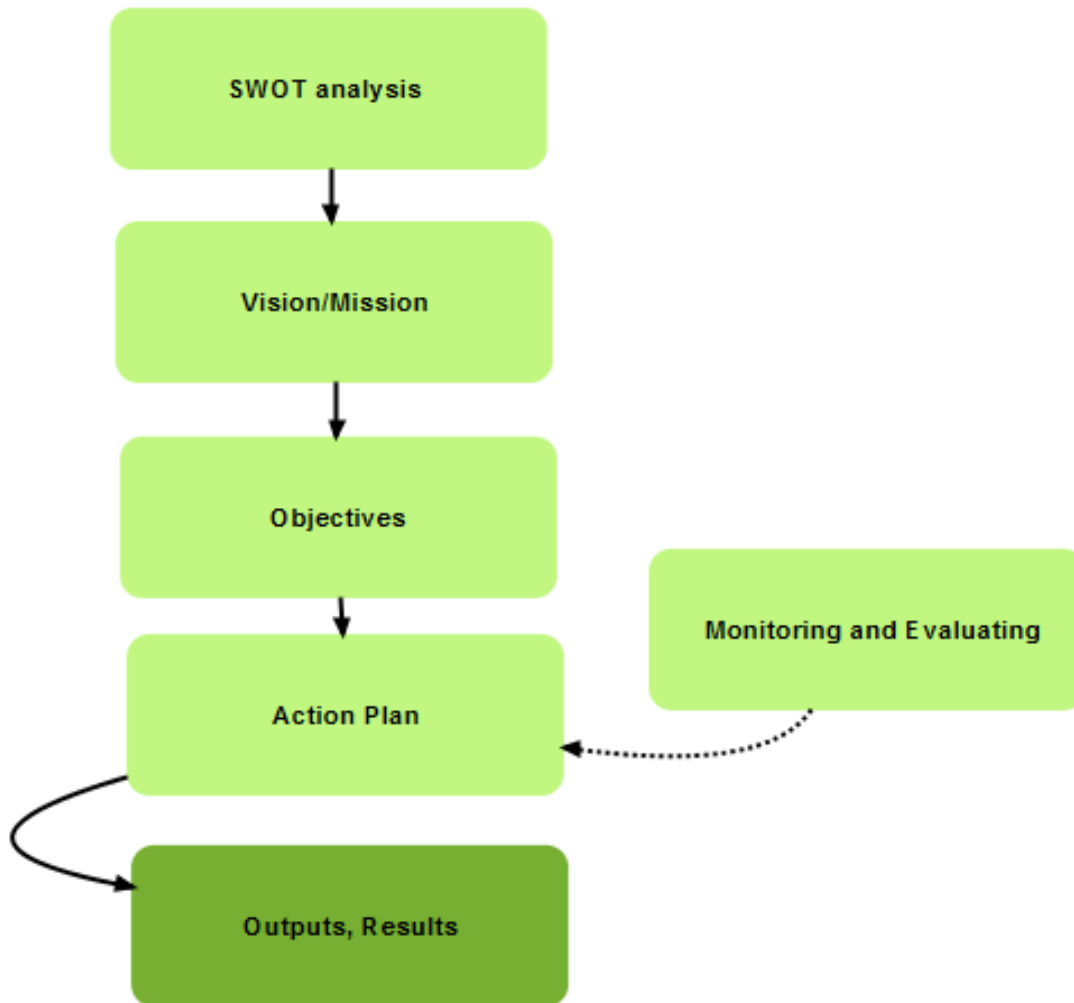
Action plans should therefore be closely linked to the realisation of the outputs requested by the strategic goals defined in the NSDS. If the strategic goals are clearly defined, according to the SMART approach, i.e., Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bounded, it shouldn't be difficult to identify the actions related to the objectives.

Based on the overall strategy of the NSDS, operational objectives are linked to the main areas of intervention (**See IDENTIFYING STRATEGIC GOALS**). An action plan should be created for each area of intervention, with a clear identification of the tasks that have to be undertaken to deliver the desired outputs and to achieve the strategy.

Action Plans will refer to capacity areas of the NSS to which the operational objectives are related: political and technical governance (management), human resources, physical and statistical infrastructure, funding, statistical policies, processes and partnerships. All these aspects should be taken into consideration and reflect the national context and administrative set up of the country.

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HOW TO DESIGN AN ACTION PLAN ?

When you have clearly in mind what you want to achieve, you can define the outputs that are needed to reach the operational objectives. The purpose (outcome) for each objective has to be identified as well as the outputs. If it is the case, it will facilitate the identification of tasks and activities that need to be conducted.

The identification of activities by itself doesn't make the action plan, which needs to be more than the enumeration of activities that we need to carry out. Besides the enumeration, an action plan or work programme should include: a time frame (When?); an evaluation of the existing capacities in order to identify missing capacities (How?); a cost evaluation (How much ?); the identification of the actors (Who?); appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and assessing progress (What for ?).

An action plan includes:

- **Who** is going to do what – assigning the responsibilities and setting targets;
- **When** – estimating the schedule and duration of activity;
- **In what order** – determining the sequence and dependence of activities;
- **How** – defining human, technical and financial resources needed;
- **What for** – identifying and selecting indicators that can be used to track progress and monitor the performance of the action.

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One activity decomposed in tasks will facilitate the development of the timeframe. A precise action plan in the NSDS will be an added value not only for the NSI and NSS but also for donors and international organisations because it can give them a clear idea about the activities by sector that need to be implemented and the costs of each activity.

The Action Plan should be inserted in a logical framework reflecting the intervention logic of the strategy for the development of statistics in the country. The table below shows the logical framework linking a strategy and the related action plan.

Contents of the Logical Framework to present the strategy and action plan

Overall objective	The broad development impact to which the project/NSDS contributes
Outcome (Purpose)	The development outcome at the end of the NSDS implementation, more specifically the expected benefits to the target groups
Outputs	The direct and tangible results (goods and services) that the NSDS will deliver and which are largely under the project management control
Activities	The tasks (work programme) that need to be carried out to deliver the planned results
Indicators	Indicators are linked to the objective-based planning and measure how the objectives, purpose, results and activities of the NSDS will be achieved

MAIN CONTENTS OF THE ACTION PLAN

An action plan should be detailed and used like a daily instrument for the individuals, in charge of its development, to control the actions, costs and timeline, to monitor and evaluate the implementation, to make necessary adjustments and to assess the results.

In order to prepare a detailed activity plan, the following should be considered:

1. List the main activities
2. Break the activities into manageable tasks
3. Clarify the sequence and dependencies between the tasks
4. Estimate the start-up, duration and completion of the activities
5. Summarise scheduling of the main activities
6. Define the milestones
7. Define the existing capacities and the inputs (equipment, expertise...) that are missing
8. Allocate tasks among the team

A project management software can be used to prepare the action plan, but an excel file is enough and easier to prepare and disseminate.

BUDGETING FOR AN ACTION PLAN

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Once the activities for the period of the NSDS are defined, you need to translate them into annual action plans, with a detailed work programme and the respective budget. The work programme should be underpinned by a budget, to control operations and results.

The budget is in fact crucial for the implementation of the action plans. All the actions need to be carefully budgeted to have an overview of the total cost of the action plan and to identify the ways of financing it.

The budget will:

- Show the total current and investment costs for the implementation of the actions;
- Specify the expected burden on the national budget or external financing requirements;
- Describe in some detail how resources will be used, by main expenditure items, current costs, incremental costs and capital expenditure.

The costing of a NSDS implementation in developing countries might be difficult to define due to the uncertainties of the countries, but it is crucial to have a clear cost estimation of the statistical operations and activities to be carried out to help the definition of the funding strategy (**SEE BUDGETING AND FINANCE**).

In practice

Who and When

The actors to be mobilised should be clearly identified in the action plan, with reference to the institutions concerned, inside and outside the NSS.

How

- Action plans are needed because their preparation processes contribute to restrict the gap between Objectives of the NSDS and its degree of implementation, one of the main drawbacks identified in the evaluation of the NSDS. Well prepared action plans will allow you to be realistic.

- Complete and extremely detailed action plans are a heavy burden in the preparation process. In order not to discourage the preparation team, a precise action plan should be available for the first implementation year of the NSDS. For the remaining years, estimations of the time framework and of the costs of the outputs can be rougher.

- Action plans should take into account the level of priorities in the strategic objectives of the NSDS. Action plans are needed for all the priorities defined in the strategy.

- An assessment of the capacities available in the NSS for each activity is needed in order to identify the missing capacities, the strategy to mobilise them and the costs to be faced. Action plans have no chance to be implemented if the corresponding resources have not been sufficiently secured in the preceding phase and rationalized in a funding strategy.

- When an activity is part of a sequence, the action plan should mention that it is a prerequisite for another activity or that another activity is a prerequisite and take into

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account the constraints implied.

- It bears repeating that countries have an on-going statistical programme including already planned censuses or surveys operations that both have to be maintained for the most part, revised for some and expanded as a result of agreed strategic goals for the period.

- The implementation of the first year of the plan has to include the ongoing programme for that same year.

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