

Implementation

Implementation is the execution, realisation and management of the action plan designed for the NSDS for it to actually materialise. During the implementation phase, the NSDS changes from its initial form of ideas and words into actions, specific projects (ex: carrying out an additional survey, revamping the website, drafting a new law, constructing a new building...) and new tasks, in addition to regular activities such as the consumer price index. Implementation should be at the heart of the preoccupations of those involved in the design of the NSDS in order to secure its success.

It has been observed that many effectively formulated strategies fail because the ability to execute a strategy has not been correctly taken into account at the design stage. The capacity to implement a strategy should drive the design phase and limit the scope of the objectives.

For implementation to take place successfully and efficiently, it should be well planned (**SEE ELABORATING ACTION PLANS**). Implementation must be based on a well laid-out action plan, while at the same time, should keep a certain degree of flexibility to be able to quickly react and adapt to unexpected situations. During the design of the action plans, the capacity to implement should have been a constant preoccupation.

Implementing an NSDS is meant to be a continuous activity. When a new NSDS is being designed, it is likely that the current NSDS will still be under implementation. In addition, some activities may even continue to be implemented through the next NSDS implementation period. Implementation is a daily activity that involves everyone and which takes part in all the steps of the NSDS development.

It is likely that countries having implemented a first NSDS have established a governance structure for their NSS; the implementation of an NSDS is then driven by the strategic management system of the NSS governance.

NSDS IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

1. Check the consistency and feasibility of the action plan

The implementation phase requires a consistent and robust action plan. As it has been mentioned (**SEE ELABORATING ACTION PLANS**) a detailed and complete action plan is needed for the first year of the NSDS. This will be valid repeatedly for each year, not only the first one as required by a rigorous programming approach. Most of the failures observed in the countries where NSDS have been adopted are closely linked to the lack of action plans, to incoherent or imprecise planning or to action plans requiring capacities out of reach for the NSS. This means that at the end of year (T-1) a work plan for the year T should be available after validation by the authority of the NSS and consultation with the various stakeholders and implementing partners. The quality of the annual action plan is a key element in the success of the implementation of the NSDS.

2. Promote an active involvement of senior management and an appropriate

governance of the implementation process

The responsibility for the implementation of the NSDS should rely on the authority of the NSS. For that purpose, a high profile professional, the "NSDS implementation leader", will be designated with appropriate authority to lead the implementation process. This professional will report directly and on a regular basis to the head of the NSS. He/She will prepare the meetings of the Steering Committee, inform the head of the NSS, alert him/her and suggest initiatives when needed. The implementation of the NSDS should be of the highest priority for the authority of the NSS and senior management. It should be clearly communicated to all staff.

It is recommended that a Steering Committee be implemented, with a view on the whole process, and involving representatives of the various agencies (NSO, Line Ministries, other agencies) in the implementation. The Committee may also include representatives of important users of statistics. The Committee will meet on a regular basis as a consultative body (two or three times a year). A presentation of the achievements and failures of the current year and of the work plan for the year T should be made at the end of year T-1.

3. Division into smaller “projects”

Small teams with leaders and professionals from all the entities involved will have the technical responsibility for the implementation of the action plan. The teams will be based on the outputs identified in the work plan. It requires a division of the action plan.

Small “projects” could be built around each output or around a few closely related ones. Splitting the strategy into smaller projects and tasks will lead to specific activities that can be managed. By proceeding with small projects, they can be tailored to the human and financial resources available and accomplished in a scheduled fashion.

Each “project” related to specific outputs will be broken down into phases related to the various steps required by its completion.

4. Aiming for permanent structures

In the same way that theories are built above practices, structures and approaches should be developed with a view to satisfying larger issues than only those at hand. Each time a new project is launched, the NSS should identify which aspects are specific and which are of an interest that might be common to the overall program. This allows defining the project (or its subcomponent) to include a lasting component about infrastructure, knowledge, process, or the working environment.

5. Exploiting the power of human resources and communications

During project implementation, the human factor is of prime importance. Team members must be convinced of the relevance of the objectives of all the projects related to the NSDS. It is important to set up a governance structure with the appropriate committee members in order to benefit from a rich and diverse expertise of staff.

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A human resource approach will be needed in order to mobilise and motivate the professionals involved in the implementation of the NSDS. Poor mobilisation is one of the explanations of the failures observed in the cases where evaluation took place.

An active and regular communication approach is needed. Information about why decisions are made should be clearly and promptly provided to employees. Further interactions between the various components of the NSS and the various employees involved should be strongly encouraged.

6. Documentation, evaluation, monitoring and adjustments

Documentation and evaluation both play important roles in ensuring quality of a program and in informing managers.

Documentation is a key component of quality maintenance as well as sound risk management. While it clearly establishes definitions, it also allows a statistical program to avoid depending on the expertise of a given individual and is a means of transferring the knowledge acquired and necessary for maintaining programs. Documentation can be in a variety of forms (document, formal paper, minutes, guidelines, procedures, etc.) and about several aspects (concepts, methods, process, purpose of methods used) of a program. Documentation is also an important input to the evaluation process.

Evaluation measures should be defined at the very beginning of projects with a view to using them not simply to report about the project, but rather to help steer the project in the right direction. Evaluation measures can be quantitative (number of, rates, percentages) or qualitative (**SEE M&E EVALUATION**).

In many instances, as projects evolve through time, they will often need to be adjusted based on the knowledge gained. Such a re-organisation of the project is not a sign of failure, but rather a sign that newly acquired information is used to adapt to the changing context. A strong monitoring process will provide the information needed to feed the adjustment process.

In practice

Implementation of the NSDS can be carried out through several distinct phases: preparation; execution; evaluation.

NSDS Implementation steps

A. PREPARATION PHASE

The preparation phase will ensure that the different aspects of the action plan are properly organized.

Step A.1: Confirm resources

Once a person has been identified as the NSDS implementation leader, his/her role should be detailed and recognized. This person should be in charge of project planning, coordination of the activities and be accountable for the results. The number and type of human resources necessary to execute the activities should be identified. The availability of employees with the right skills within the project's timeframe needs to be confirmed.

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Financial resources, both salary and non-salary, also need to be confirmed by senior management to ensure that the project will have sufficient funds over the allotted timeframe to bring it to completion.

Step A.2: Establish governance

A governance structure should be established to oversee the progress throughout the duration of the project. For example, there may be a need for a steering committee, composed of senior management members, to oversee all the NSDS related projects and provide strategic direction. The scope of the action plan will also dictate what other levels of governance may be necessary. The splitting into small “projects” may just require project managers linked to the NSDS implementation leader or a small team involving the entities concerned. In any case, all committees and teams should have a precise mandate with the roles of its members clearly defined. The frequency of the meetings for each committee should also be established at this point.

Step A.3: Organise activities

A list of all activities, tasks required to attain the final result should be prepared for each output or “project”. At this point, it is useful to evaluate whether any activity can borrow from processes already in place in other departments within the NSO or in other partner agencies. Based on financial and human resources limitations, a prioritization of activities may need to be performed. Some activities which are less essential to the project’s achievements may be downsized or postponed. The responsibility for execution of each activity listed in the schedule of activities should be assigned to a particular team or team member. Dependencies between activities should be identified so that the different activities can be ordered sequentially and put into a schedule. Some activities will need to be executed in sequential order as the output of one activity will be needed to start the next. Other activities with no dependencies may be conducted in parallel, provided that enough resources are available.

Step A.4: Set up measurement and documentation tools

In order to monitor the activities’ progress and success, measurable indicators should be defined. Indicators should be selected to be (SMART) Specific, Measurable, Achievable (realistic), Relevant, Time-bound. A scheduled means for reporting on these indicators should be established, for example through monthly/quarterly/annual reports. With proper documentation and regular monitoring, managers will be able to make adjustments to the projects when required (i.e. in terms of finance, time, approach, etc.) and stay on track with the goal.

Step A.5: Evaluate risks and prepare mitigation strategy

Good planning also includes thoughtful consideration of risks. Risks should be listed and evaluated in terms of how likely they are to occur (low, medium, high likelihood) and in terms of the impact they can have on the project results (low, medium, high impact). Each risk should have a mitigation strategy to diminish its likelihood of occurrence and impact, should it materialize.

Step A.6: Establish communication strategy

A project’s success also depends on good communication (see D.ADVOCACY) . A communication strategy should be prepared to ensure that all team members will be abreast of the progress, changes and arising issues concerning the activities. This can

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include distribution of progress reports, meeting minutes, information about major milestones reached, etc.

B. EXECUTION PHASE

The execution phase is the longer phase of the implementation as it is the phase in which the “project work” is carried out.

Step B.1: Monitor progress regularly

The activities needed for an output or “project” should be monitored regularly to ensure that it is on track with respect to achieving its objectives. Progress should be monitored through regular meetings or reports. Indicators identified in Step B.4 can be measured on a regular basis. Monitoring should also include a regular review of budget expenses to ensure that the budget remains within its financial limits. The schedule of activities should also be monitored regularly to confirm that activities are completed within their allotted time or if any delays may hinder the results.

Step B.2: Communicate

Senior management, governance committees and team members should be briefed regularly on the project’s progress and setbacks. Good communication will ensure that the action plan is implemented smoothly. For example, reports summarizing progress can be distributed to senior management, whereas decisions on more technical aspects can be available electronically for consultation by team members.

Step B.3: Address issues

Issues should be addressed as soon as they arise as they may impact more than one activity and affect the schedule of the project. More important issues may be brought to governance committees for strategic advice.

C. EVALUATION PHASE

Shortly after the project has come to an end, key players should be consulted to gain insight on what went well and what could have been done differently. These lessons learned should be documented as they will provide useful input for future projects.

Step C.1: Gather feedback

Once the outputs have been completed, it is important to gather the feedback of the key players on the different components. This exercise could take the form of an informal group discussion or individual questionnaires, and should occur shortly after completion of the activities. Feedback should touch on what went well, what did not work well, and suggestions for improvements. It should cover all implementation dimensions (including planning, communication, management, etc...).

Step C.2: Document

A short document should be prepared to summarize the results of the feedback exercise.

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Lessons learned are always useful information for managers and provide good input to the next version of the NSDS.

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