

6. Peer Reviews of African National Statistical Systems

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Abstract

The PARIS21 Secretariat has facilitated peer reviews of the National Statistical Systems (NSSs) of seven countries since 2005. The first review of the Ghana statistical system in 2005 was a pilot, followed by reviews in Tanzania and Zambia in 2007. At the time of writing in 2009, peer reviews have been carried out in Burkina Faso, Malawi, Mozambique, and Niger. The peer review findings are treated as confidential but in the case of Tanzania, Malawi, and Mozambique, the host governments have already accepted the reports as public documents for wide dissemination.

This paper sets out the rationale, coverage, and methodology for the peer reviews carried out to date and considers the reporting and dissemination of the findings. Some examples of statistical and organizational good practice that were noted by the peer reviewers are highlighted. The list is not exhaustive but they are included in the interests of sharing experiences.

Key words: NSDS, rationale, coverage, methodology, good practice, African Charter on Statistics

Résumé

Depuis 2005, le Secrétariat de PARIS21 a facilité les revues par les pairs des systèmes statistiques nationaux (SSN) de sept pays. La première revue du système statistique du Ghana en 2005 était un exercice pilote, suivi des revues en Tanzanie et en Zambie en 2007. Au moment de la rédaction de cet article en 2009, des revues par les pairs ont été effectués au Burkina Faso, au Malawi, au Mozambique, et au Niger. Les résultats des revues par les pairs sont traités comme confidentiels mais dans le cas de la Tanzanie, du Malawi, et de la Mozambique, les gouvernements hôtes ont déjà accepté que les rapports soient considérés comme des documents publics à disséminer largement.

Cet article présente la logique, l'étendue, et la méthodologie des revues par les pairs effectuées jusqu'ici et les rapports et la diffusion des résultats. Quelques exemples de bonne pratique statistique et d'organisation qui ont été notés par les revues par les pairs sont mis en exergue. La liste n'est pas exhaustive mais ces exemples sont présentés dans l'objectif de partage d'expérience.

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Mots clés : SNDS, logique, couverture, méthodologie, bonne pratique, Charte africaine sur des statistiques

1. RATIONALE FOR PEER REVIEWS

The African peer reviews of NSSs were launched in 2003 by the Economic Commission for Africa's Committee on Development Information (CODI). CODI recommended that African countries, supported by PARIS21, should carry out peer reviews to ensure that good practice passes from country to country, based on the first-hand experience of peers, to help accelerate the development of national statistical systems. This responded to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) agenda for greater transparency and openness in governance (including through peer reviews) and drew on the longstanding experiences of peer reviews carried out between members of OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Subsequently, Eurostat has facilitated peer reviews of EU member states, focused on the adoption of the European Statistical Code of Practice.

CODI recommended that policymakers should be included in the peer reviews of African NSSs for advocacy purposes, to share experiences of policy approaches, to provide their feedback as users of the statistical practices they encounter, and to avoid the peer reviews being associated only with the statistical community.

The focus of the peer reviews is on the governance of the NSS, its organization, strategic planning, service to users, funding and sustainability. In the case of the four peer reviews carried out in 2009, all of this was set against the backdrop of the UN's Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and on the African Charter on Statistics' best practice principles for professional independence, quality, mandates and resources, dissemination, protection of confidentiality, and coordination and cooperation. The African Charter on Statistics was adopted in Addis Ababa by African Heads of States and Governments on February 4, 2009, while the peer review of Mozambique was underway.

Peer reviews are highly relevant to the design and implementation of National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDSs). The success of each country's NSDS depends on senior managers of statistical systems, as well as on policymakers and decisionmakers, demonstrating commitment to the implementation, which requires a number of years of substantial and often difficult change processes. Peer reviewers share experiences of what

solutions have worked in their own countries and elsewhere in the region; and through their advocacy, peers can help to facilitate change in the processes of government and their relations with cooperating partners. The peer reviews can also help to evaluate the effectiveness of NSDS processes and to ensure that good practice is transmitted from country to country at the level of heads of statistics and senior policymakers.

In the view of the authors, a peer review provides a very valuable input to the process of developing and building support to implement a country's NSDS. The peer review can add value at various stages of the NSDS – for instance, as an input to the design stage in parallel with user consultation exercises; or as a means of reviewing progress during implementation – which has been the case to date for African NSSs.

Part of the unique value of the peer reviews has been the level of support and access afforded by the host countries; the information exchange between the hosts and reviewers; and the inclusion of policymakers as peers. The Government Statistician of Ghana described the peer review of her country as “empowering,” while the President of INE Mozambique said that their review will boost advocacy, the self-esteem of NSS staff, and the confidence of users.

The African process differs from the EU peer reviews in that the governance and organization of statistics is the main focus, rather than technical issues of statistical production. The reason for this is that the time and resources available for the peer reviews are limited, and a full technical review would be more resource-intensive. Second, a large proportion of African statistical systems have already undergone or are due to undergo major reforms, and much is to be learned from sharing experiences.

2. TOPICS COVERED BY PEER REVIEWS

Topics for consideration in the peer reviews are decided right at the start. Annex A to this article details potential topics, but all of the reviews so far have assessed:

- Progress of design and implementation of the country's NSDS;
- Statistical governance, legal mandates, and coordination;
- Financial resource availability and predictability, both from governments and cooperating partners; and the extent to which donor funding is focused on national priorities;

- Human resources management; and
- User consultation, prioritization, and satisfaction.

As outlined above, the peer reviews are not intended to make a technical assessment of the quality of official statistics produced by a country; however, an assessment can be made of the capacity to produce, disseminate, and use official statistics. The theoretical underpinning for this is PARIS21's Statistical Capacity Building Indicators, which are based on the IMF's Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF), particularly those aspects related to data quality, serviceability, and accessibility. Use of PARIS21's NSDS Essentials checklist provides background information to help to benchmark the quality of NSDS design processes.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the African peer reviews, each country was reviewed by two other countries. For instance, for the peer review of Burkina Faso, the reviewers were from Cameroon and Niger; for Malawi, they came from Mozambique and Tanzania; and for Mozambique, from Malawi and Tanzania. The countries acting as peers provide two reviewers, normally their head of statistics (or deputy head) and a senior policymaker (such as head of the Poverty Reduction Strategy unit, or senior policy user or funder of statistics). Facilitators were provided by the PARIS21 Secretariat.

So far the countries that have participated have either been self-selected or accepted an invitation to participate. Ghana and Tanzania volunteered during the CODI meeting in 2003 and follow-up; the other countries agreed to participate when approached by PARIS21.

The Head Statistician of the country being reviewed hosts the review. The host is responsible for receiving his or her peer reviewers and for arranging a program of meetings to enable them to complete their task. Typically the reviews are carried out over four working days. The host country provides the reviewers with key documents, including: statistical legislation, organizational structure and staffing, strategic plans, funding details, lists of publications, and anything else that the host country thinks might be useful.

Interviews with NSS stakeholders have formed the core of the peer reviews. The teams meet senior managers and staff of the NSS; and with a selection of other producers and key users of official statistics from within Parliament, government, the central bank, private sector, the media and academia; as

well as funders of the NSS, including ministries responsible for finance, and cooperating partners. The interviews are guided by a discussion schedule (see Annex B) but reviewers have the flexibility to deviate from this schedule and to pursue topics in depth. One of the main benefits of the peer reviews has been the opportunity during interviews for peer reviewers to share experiences from their own countries.

4. COSTS

The costs of the peer reviews have been shared by PARIS21 and the host country. This is in addition to the valuable senior staff time given freely by the host governments and reviewers. PARIS21 has funded international travel and per diem expenses, as well as providing the facilitators; while the host countries have provided internal travel and office facilities. Peer reviews are not necessarily directly linked to NSDS processes but, where they are, country costs can be included in NSDS funding.

5. REPORTING AND DISSEMINATING THE FINDINGS

The facilitators accompany the reviewers during their interviews and prepare notes on the findings of each meeting for approval by the review team. The reviewers and the facilitators are professionally bound to retain confidentiality on the issues discussed. To do otherwise might jeopardize the frankness of the peer review process. At the close of the mission, the reviewers generally provide a verbal report with observations and recommendations to the most senior official with responsibility for the statistical system (e.g. the Prime Minister in the case of Mozambique).

A full report is then prepared by the facilitators and agreed with the review team before being submitted to the host government. It is the government that decides if the report can be made public. Any findings that cannot be made public because they are of a sensitive nature – or because they breach the confidentiality of the peer review process – can be provided separately by the peer reviewers to the host government; but this has not been necessary in the case of the reviews conducted so far.

In each of the four peer reviews conducted to date (in 2009), the peer reviewers made observations and recommendations covering aspects such as: governance; strategic planning and implementation; statistical products; advocacy and dissemination; financing; staffing and staff development; and

further sharing of experiences. In the case of Malawi and Mozambique, the host governments have already accepted the reports as public documents to be disseminated widely. It is hoped that this practice will be emulated by all countries. Prior to this latest set of four countries, only the review of Tanzania had to date produced a publicly-available document.

6. SHARING “GOOD PRACTICE” EXAMPLES

Many examples of good practice have been identified by the peer reviewers. The selection below gives examples of the value that the peer reviews can deliver through the sharing of experiences. The exclusion of a country against any particular point does not necessarily mean that it is not applicable to them; rather it indicates that it was not identified as such by the peer reviewers.

Statistical production:

- Quick results from the most recent population censuses (Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania);
- Re-basing and publishing of a new series of national accounts developed via a Supply-Use Table (Malawi);
- Quality and timeliness of the Consumer Price Index (mentioned by users in Malawi and Zambia);
- Proper account taken of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (Burkina Faso, Niger);
- Publication of a statistical release calendar (Mozambique, planned in Malawi);
- Transformation of production and quality of statistics since semi-autonomous status (noted by users in Tanzania).

Strategic planning/ institutional development:

- Well-developed strategic planning processes (Malawi and Mozambique are both on their third generation of strategic plans);
- Strong leadership from the NSO and regular meetings of the National Statistical Council (Niger, Burkina Faso);
- Legal basis being revised in line with the African Charter on Statistics (Mozambique);
- Semi-autonomous statistical agency and governing board (Tanzania);
- High profile and status of statistics, including level of President of INE and High Council on Statistics is chaired by the Prime Minister (Mozambique).

User focus:

- Training/ workshops for the media (Malawi, Mozambique);
- Innovative advocacy and dissemination work (e.g. Statistics Diary in Mozambique).

Staffing and staff development:

- High retention rates of statistical staff (Malawi and Mozambique);
- Effectiveness and qualifications of staff and increase in staff numbers (Burkina Faso);
- Taking forward training efforts in collaboration with local training institutions (Mozambique, Zambia);
- Existence of a training center for statistics within the NSO (Niger);
- Providing a training resource for the region (EASTC Tanzania);
- Development of staff (INE Mozambique has doubled its number of staff and increased the percentage of professional staff from 8 percent to 30 percent over ten years);
- Existence of a Statistical Association (in Malawi, but not in Zambia or Mozambique).

Cooperating partners:

- Existence of a development partner group for statistics (Tanzania and Zambia; subsequently formed in Malawi);
- Strong support from partners and a desire to create a donor group on statistics (Burkina Faso, Niger);
- Well-developed relationship with development partners (Mozambique, evidenced by pooling of donor funds in a common fund to support statistical development);
- Effective south–south cooperation (e.g. Malawi in its Population and Housing Census);
- Cooperation between countries through AFRISTAT.

7. NEXT STEPS

Following an assessment of the peer review processes and methods conducted so far, other reviews will be planned in Africa and beyond, according to the demand coming from countries. Based on experiences to date, there will be a clear objective to publish the findings with the agreement of the host governments, in the interests of transparency and the sharing of experiences.

It is hoped that as the process of peer review is extended and deepened, the reviews will be linked even more closely to the principles enshrined in the African Charter on Statistics and NEPAD processes.

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ANNEX A: POTENTIAL TOPICS FOR PEER REVIEW

1. Financial Resources Availability

- a. Adequacy, regularity and reliability
- b. Donor dependence
- c. Adaptability
- d. Utilization
- e. Financial reporting
- f. Budget preparation and prioritization
- g. Donor support & coordination

2. Human Resources Management

- a. Staff numbers – qualified and unqualified
- b. Staff retention
- c. Training programs/strategies in place
- d. Salaries and incentives

3. Strategy/Plan Development

- a. When prepared
- b. How prepared and by whom
- c. Implementation progress – what has been achieved / what not achieved
- d. Obstacles and possible solutions
- e. Progress of legal changes
- f. Civil service reform – challenges and opportunities
- g. Poverty monitoring plans

4. User Consultation, Prioritization and Satisfaction

- a. User consultation processes carried out
- b. Prioritization process
- c. Dissemination/output plan
- d. Links to PRSP and MDG indicators – is there a plan to satisfy needs?
- e. User satisfaction, credibility and relevance

- f. Publications and website
- g. Procedures for dealing with user requests
- h. Availability of metadata
- i. Quality assurance

5. Statistical System Coordination

- a. Is the entire statistical system coordinated by the Government Statistician?
- b. How is coordination achieved?
- c. Common standards and definitions in place
- d. Resolution of conflicting estimates achieved
- e. Is there a single source for access to all statistics?

6. Legal Basis

- a. Is the law adequate?
- b. What revisions are required?
- c. Opinion on independence of operation

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

- a. Contribution of statistics strategy to the development of the system
- b. Improvements recommended
- c. Likely support required
- d. Obstacles requiring resolution
- e. Likely outcome
- f. Good practice observed for dissemination
- g. Coordination activities

ANNEX B: DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR PEER REVIEWERS

1. Matters of Fact Concerning Respondent

- a. Job title and organization
- b. Details of their statistical interests
- c. Details of the statistics and information they need

2. Opinion of Statistical Products

- a. Quality of the information they receive from NSO/NSS
- b. Relevance of the information
- c. Timeliness of the information

3. Accessibility

- a. How is the information obtained from NSO/NSS?
- b. How can access be improved?

4. Adequacy of the Institutional Set-up

- a. Opinion on the institutional set-up
- b. Suitability of the personnel
- c. Recommendations for improving personnel weaknesses
- d. Adequacy of NSO/NSS resources
- e. Who are the potential champions of statistics?

5. Advice

- a. What advice would they give to the NSO/NSS?
- b. What changes would they recommend?