



Overview on PARIS21 Statistical Building Capacity Indicators

1. In May 2001, PARIS21 set up the Task Team on Statistical Capacity Building Indicators to develop indicators that would help track progress of countries in building their statistical capacity. The following presents a summary of the Task Team final report¹ presented at the PARIS21 Consortium meeting on October 2002.

2. While devising indicators was neither a quick nor a simple task, the importance of monitoring statistical development kept driving the Team's efforts forward. The indicators had to be distilled from complex statistical processes performed by a large and diverse number of data producing agencies that differ across countries. Devising statistical capacity building indicators entailed focusing on the variables relevant to statistical production while ensuring that the information for the indicators could reasonably be provided without undue burden. This meant that the indicators needed to be concise and yet clear to produce. They had to provide for a bird's-eye view of the situation, and this meant limiting their number. At the same time, they had to portray a sufficiently representative picture of the statistical conditions to permit comparison across datasets. They needed to provide a reading that could track changes in conditions over time. Finally, for international comparability purposes, they also needed to be the same across countries, and made available to the international community.

3. The Team first worked to build a common vision on what statistical capacity and the building of such capacity entailed. It exploited extensively the rich statistical literature, discussed members' experience in statistical capacity building, and consulted with donor agencies. An international seminar was also convened at the IMF in April 2002 to seek the views of 20 governments with experience on statistical capacity building. The Team met on three occasions (May and September 2001 and April 2002) with intensive work carried out between meetings, and recruited three respected international consultants to help identify and test indicators.

¹ <http://www.paris21.org/htm/task/scbi/scbifnlrpt.pdf>

The SCB indicators

4. This process led to SCB indicators that are made up of 16 quantitative indicators and 18 qualitative indicators.

5. The *quantitative* indicators cover resources (domestically and externally funded annual budget, staff, and equipment), inputs (surveys and administrative sources) and statistical products. The resource indicators are intended to show the extent of success in obtaining funding both from own government and external donors, data sources, and human resources. They indicate the bargaining position in obtaining valued resources and the ability to use resources in the production process to achieve performance. These quantitative indicators provide a rough idea of the depth and breath of statistical activities

6. Their usefulness is limited, however, as benchmarks against which the values of the indicators can be assessed do not exist. Further, the output indicators do not measure for effectiveness, since they do not show to what extent the statistics are effectively used. Nor do the resource indicators provide for efficiency measures, because the amount of resources used cannot be readily related to all required characteristics of the statistical outputs. The quantitative indicators need to be viewed within the context of how the statistical activities are carried out, as measured by the qualitative indicators that serve more as measures of efficiency and effectiveness of statistical production.

7. The *qualitative* indicators embrace the broader view of factors in the statistical environment, the statistical process, and the characteristics of the statistical products in meeting users' needs. They help to show the following: (1) if the legal and institutional environment facilitates the production of the statistics, (2) if the resources are sufficient and activities meshed to promote productivity, (3) if the culture is amenable to quality work, (4) if the integrity and professionalism are protected and transparency measures are in place, (5) if the core statistical processes are performed according to methodological requirements and the source data available and techniques used are adequate, (6) if measures are in place to maintain the relevancy of the products, and (7) if the characteristics of the statistics produced fit users' needs. Each indicator is evaluated against a four-scale assessment level, to which are attached benchmark descriptions: Level 4 applies to highly developed statistical activities; level 3 to moderately well-developed activities; level 2 to activities that are developing but still have many deficiencies; and level 1 to activities that are underdeveloped. The ratings were designed with a view that ratings of 3 or 4 would refer to activities where no external support would be required.

Compilation of the SCB indicators

8. The indicators come in the form of a questionnaire to be completed by data producers. The questionnaire is made up of a table that contains the indicators, along with the relevant instructions to provide the information. The table was designed to serve both as a collection and dissemination device, with minimal editing required between these two functions.

9. The indicators can be compiled for internal management purposes and/or for international comparability purposes. As a management tool, the producers can apply the quantitative indicators to the data producing agency under review, and the qualitative indicators to the data being targeted. The results will provide data producers with an overview of the capacity of the agency to produce the statistics in question.

10. For comparative purposes across countries, the indicators need to be common across countries, and three measurement levels were selected. A first level, the *system-wide indicators*, consists in identifying for a country the statistics produced, inclusive of the year of reference to which they apply, along with the identification of the producing agencies. The second level, *agency-related indicators*, consists in applying the quantitative indicators to the agency(ies) responsible of producing the GDP, the population and the household income and expenditure statistics, whereas the last level, the *data related indicators*, involves applying the qualitative indicators to GDP, population and household income and expenditure.

11. An experimental period is suggested for the SCB indicators to provide the time for data producers to become familiar with the indicators, for PARIS21 to promote the indicators with the data producing agency in charge of coordinating statistics in a country, and for firming up the indicators as lessons are learned from their application.

Concluding notes

12. While generally applicable to countries in all stages of statistical development, the SCB indicators could be more specifically useful to countries that are “statistically challenged,” that is countries whose statistical systems are not sustainable, as evidenced by their relying extensively on external assistance.

13. By providing a snapshot reading of these countries’ statistical circumstances, the SCB indicators should help them in identifying strengths and weaknesses, in planning toward specific goals, and in monitoring the activities leading to these goals.

14. The SCB indicators can also facilitate communication and coordination among the organizations involved in technical assistance. By providing common measuring rods of countries’ statistical capacity needs, they can help toward shedding further light on the statistical circumstances of countries, providing a means to share results systematically, and presenting a comparative view of statistical capacity building across countries. Further, the indicators can track the statistical development over time and, hence, provide the donor community with an additional means to account for its technical assistance.

15. The SCB indicators can be viewed as a promising beginning with the intent of further promoting a climate where the statistical information becomes an essential support for national policies and good governance.

16. The final report of the Statistical Capacity Building Indicators task team, including the questionnaire and the benchmark descriptions of data related indicators can be found at [<http://www.paris21.org/>].