

Status Report of the Task Team for Development of the Virtual Statistical System

Information for Steering Committee Meeting

November 2007

Background

The Virtual Statistical System (VSS) aims to provide developing countries with an internet-based portal to help them access information on official statistics, to assess the status of their statistical systems and develop strategies for improvement. Although at present several websites present useful information, there is no portal that provides access to all information sources in a structured way. The portal, when created, will add significant value to this existing information by creating a common framework for accessing this information and providing access to relevant documentation.

The VSS concept was discussed at the last Steering Committee meeting, and a Task Team was formed, led by the World Bank and including Eurostat, the IMF, and the Development Gateway Foundation.

Progress

Members of the Task Team have drafted a number of working papers, including reviewing suitable methods to classify statistical activities and topics in order to present information clearly to users. Based on these papers, a draft structure has been designed which will organise resources by subject matter (domain or theme), or statistical activities (often sequential and carried out by distinct units, with specialised skills and functions, of a statistical organisation). Using this structure provides much of the added-value of the VSS, since it helps users address capacity and technical weaknesses and helps them recognise similarities between different production processes and develop customised solutions. It also helps facilitate linkages with various quality assessment tools, including the IMF Data Quality Assessment Framework and the quality assessment frameworks developed by Eurostat.

Based on these structures, a web-based “mock-up” of the VSS portal has been created by the Development Gateway Foundation.

Work Plan

Over the next few months, the Task Team plans to:

- (i) Review existing documentation, including other web-based portals and sources of information on official statistics;
- (ii) Engage statistical agencies of developing countries in a dialogue on the content and presentation of the VSS, so that it can effectively meet their needs;
- (iii) Agree on the scope of the VSS. There are three basic options:
 - a. A pure portal providing a way to organise links to other web-based resources;
 - b. A “rough guide” to official statistics work, with broad descriptions of subjects and activities but based on an underlying portal with links to other web-based resources;

- c. A more comprehensive website, including original material written for use by developing countries.
- (iv) Agree on the structure and underlying classification system for organising the VSS;
- (v) Develop a pilot version of the VSS website, using the agreed scope, structure, and classifications, with assistance from the Gateway Foundation.

Decisions requested of the Steering Committee

The Secretariat of PARIS21 requests the agreement of its Steering Committee to the following:

- The proposed work plan of the Task Team, as outlined above.
- The enlargement of the existing Task Team, to include representatives of developing countries from different regions.
- The allocation of resources from the budget of the PARIS21 Secretariat, to support the work plan of the Task Team.