

National Statistical Strategies Vs Institutions' Logic? Current Practice And Perspectives

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1- Introduction

As it has been practised for the last 40 years, technical assistance is being strongly questioned today, particularly in the field of statistics and, to fill its gaps, TA partners have recently ratified important initiatives among which the World Bank *Poverty Reduction Strategy* and the creation of the PARIS21 Consortium. The following paper endeavours to provide some examples along those new lines.

2- Present practice

The constraints that developing countries have to overcome are always quoted, and among them those of their statistical bodies. But it is striking to observe that no one ever quotes the other constraints that no expert or civil servant of executing agency or international organisation can avoid. And yet these constraints do exist: these experts, for instance, will be appreciated and judged according to the number of projects they will have promoted, to the amount of the funding involved, to the swiftness of projects implementation.

Thus appears a contradiction between the logic of a project and the logic of statistical development, which is a long term process, demanding a durable effort, in order to succeed in a sustainable accumulation of know-how in the framework of *stable* institutions.

2.1 The role of an Executing Agency

As a contribution to the debate, the process and mechanism of project identification, design, funding and implementation are reviewed hereafter. The purpose is to describe the *internal logic* and mode of operation of the Executing Agencies in relation to those of the other parties involved.

Typically, a statistical project involves three parties: the beneficiary country, the Donor(s), and the Executing Agency (EA) bringing its expertise and experience. In the process, the EA acts as an interface between the recipient Government and the Donor(s). It plays a critical role in the design

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and the approbation of the project. The design is done in close collaboration and consultation with the Government and the Donor(s).

The external assistance provided in the form of projects has enabled many developing countries, especially in Africa, to undertake basic data collection activities and to generate structural and current data on various sectors. However, in the light of the experience from several decades, it must be recognised that this type of intervention has rarely resulted in the development of sustainable systems of statistics in recipient countries. Thus, it appears that ***ad hoc projects are not suited for the development of stable and autonomous institutions, with sustainable technical and operational capacities for the production of statistics.***

In terms of development of sustainable statistical systems, the experience has shown various limitations including:

For recipient countries:

- the absence of a strategic framework for the development of statistical activities;
- a notion of project which is merely reduced to its financial and material dimensions;
- the insufficient commitment and support of high level national authorities.

For EAs and donors:

- a time frame for implementation of project activities not compatible with capacity building;
- criteria for the evaluation of the projects which emphasise the achievement of targeted and measurable objectives and outputs. Therefore, the national accumulation of experience and appropriation is limited and the project is seen as an external entity.

In addition to these constraints, other constraints result from the diverging or even conflicting internal logic of involved partners:

- During the phase of design, the description indicated above is translated in the real world with a variable role and weight of the three partners;
- During the implementation phase, one of the major recipient's constraints is the non-availability, in time and at the level contemplated, of the national counterpart resources, while the scheme may also be constrained by some EAs' internal rules, procedures and modes of operation;
- Lastly, it appears that very few projects have indicators for the measuring of their impact and the monitoring of the follow-up activities (constraints mainly on the EA's part).

In order to address the constraints mentioned above, a focus programme of FAO/World Bank Co-operative Programme has been launched in 1997 with the emphasis on capacity building in African countries in agricultural statistics. The initiative promotes a *long term, co-ordinated and integrated* approach based on a renewed *partnership* for agriculture statistical development.

For this Initiative to effectively meet expectations, some conditions need to be fulfilled, including: (i) the adoption, by national stakeholders, of a statistical development (users driven) framework; (ii) Government awareness of the implications of the partnership approach and firm commitment and support to the implementation; (iii) support and co-ordination from all external assistance agencies involved; (iv) mobilisation of donors.

The activities under this Initiative have started in thirteen countries. A co-ordination with PARIS21 is secured through an active partnership of the FAO Statistics Division in the Consortium.

2.2- A beneficiary country's point of view

The standpoint of the approach presented hereafter is based on monographs. From a *field analysis as detailed as possible*, the objective is to study the effects of a project on the organisation and the functioning of a statistical service, in this case the Mali DNSI.

After the January 1994 French CFA devaluation, available information to follow up and measure the impact of this decision through the consumers' price index evolution proved to be insufficient and heterogeneous; hence, by Fall 1994, the launching of the project of setting up a CPI, harmonised for the seven countries of the UEMOA (*Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest-*

Africaine). The index is today entirely operational and CPI of month n is published in each of the seven countries by the 10th of the month $n+1$, the cruising speed having been reached in September 1998.

As far as the project itself is concerned, the success is remarkable, and there is no question either about its urgency. We try here to make explicit the consequences of the project on the current work of the DNSI Division which had it in charge.

This Division had, at the onset of the project, a staff inferior by more than 1/3 to the theoretical figure, with the highest deficit on the highest level personnel. In this already tight context, the Division had to take over the new IHPC project, which had to be implemented in a short time span. The task has eventually been achieved after much arbitration, namely:

- *as concerns the management of human resources*, but the basic fact remained that the staff was much too small and some people have had to be excessively mobilised.

- *as concerns the management of the current work*, where the most negative consequences of the project were to be felt: the IHPC being a priority task, the Division has no longer the possibility to perform entirely its basic tasks, such as the Statistical Yearbook and the regional consumption price indexes publications in due time.

What are the conclusions to be drawn from these analyses and reflections?

(i)- Firstly that, if each partner obviously wishes, in his own way, that Statistics be developed, at the same time each of them is bound by its institution's logic. If the necessity to put the beneficiary countries into the driving seat is to be taken seriously, then the institutional logic of these countries must prevail against the donors' one.

(ii)- Consequently, the latter have to review their current practice in an essential dimension: time, meaning by that the obligation for them *to follow the pace of the beneficiary countries*.

(iii)- As a corollary, the management and evaluation criteria and procedures of their experts by the donors' institutions also have to be deeply reviewed. As long as, among those criteria of evaluation, will prevail such indicators as the number of "sold" projects, or their financial importance, or the promptness in paying out, etc., the experts will *logically* be prone to give priority to figures instead of giving it to appropriation and sustainability.

3- Towards a statistical strategy

The previous *analytical* part describes TA in statistics as it is implemented to-day. We would like now to show how the contradictions existing between the logics of different institutions may be overcome when these logics are integrated into the larger frame of a strategic statistical master plan.

3.1- Afristat, an example of a regional statistical strategy

By creating the Economic and Statistical Observatory in Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT) in 1993, the 14 African countries members of the Franc Zone decided to co-operate to stop the deterioration of their statistics through the acquisition of an instrument for statistical integration. Three principles guided the creation of AFRISTAT: subsidiarity, autonomy, sustainability.

As of the installation in its headquarters in Bamako, in January 1996, AFRISTAT undertook an analysis on the status of the national statistical systems (NSS) of the member States. The analysis concluded that these systems were experimenting great difficulties in answering to the requests for economic and social information. In order to face these problems, AFRISTAT member States decided to develop and execute a Minimum Statistical Common Program (PROSMIC).

3.2- The Minimum Statistical Common Program (PROSMIC): a regional strategy

The development of such a program required the identification of a limited number of priority areas and a good awareness of the information needs. The PROSMIC definition process has been

developed along three phases: analysis of the users' needs and identification of priority areas; measure of the magnitude of necessary support; program design.

PROSMIC has been designed to serve as a **reference framework** for the development of statistics in the mid-term in AFRISTAT member States; it covers a five-year period: 2001-2005. It is useful to clarify the meaning of each of the terms constituting it:

- **Program**: this is a multi-annual commitment for statistical investment.
- **Statistics** : should be understood in a broader sense, i.e. from the organisation of the system to the availability of information.
- **Minimum** : in view of their limited resources, NSS should concentrate their efforts on statistical activities considered as priorities both by statistics producers and users.
- **Common**: to all member states.

There are six **priority areas** identified for this program: statistical co-ordination; national accounts; short-term economic and social statistics; dissemination; statistics for the monitoring of household living conditions and poverty; agriculture statistics. The first four fields are considered as *structuring* themes for the NSS as a whole.

PROSMIC **overall objective** is to develop in the mid-term in all member states a minimum statistical information, that is reliable, updated, sustainable, and that allows a conscious decision making by public authorities and other economic and social actors. This will also facilitate the conception, implementation and evaluation of economic and social actions decided by the two economic and monetary unions. For each of the six selected priority areas, PROSMIC proposes common **specific objectives** that all member States must have achieved by 2005.

As a reference framework for statistical development in AFRISTAT member States, PROSMIC has been designed to serve as a core from which will be developed statistical programs at national, sub-regional and regional levels (in the frame of UEMOA and CEMAC -*Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale*). Its conception took into account current programs and initiatives at these levels. It endeavours to take profit of all possible synergies with them.

National statistical programs to be elaborated (or currently under elaboration) will certainly be more complete than PROSMIC : they may cover a larger number of topics, and for those already covered by PROSMIC, they may set higher objectives. However, they have to stay in line and to be consistent with PROSMIC.

Future statistical programs of economic and monetary Unions, while articulate with PROSMIC, should need to target statistical needs for multilateral monitoring and common sector policies and, in some cases, bear a greater coercive character for member States. Finally, the PARIS21 initiative will use PROSMIC as a strong cornerstone.

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RÉSUMÉ

La coopération technique statistique est aujourd' hui remise en question. La présente contribution en analyse les pratiques actuelles, puis montre comment un cadre stratégique de développement de la Statistique peut contribuer à un meilleur pilotage de cette coopération.