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Good Governance in National Statistical Systems

Governance of national statistical systems is a major issue in today's fast-changing environment. The continual changes in the modern economy and society require innovations in statistical measurement in the national statistical systems. The success of these systems in meeting changing data needs would depend to a large extent on how they organise the use of information technology, build up the relevant knowledge base, promote organisational effectiveness and adopt competitive strategic planning.

The strategies on good governance were discussed at a high-level international seminar held in Singapore during 28–30 May 2002. The seminar was jointly organised by the Singapore Department of Statistics, United Nations Statistics Division and Statistics Department of the International Monetary Fund. Heads of national statistical offices and heads of statistical activities in central banks attended the seminar.

Characteristics of Good Governance

"Good governance of national statistical systems fosters accountability and transparency. It improves responsiveness, cost effectiveness and efficiency. It enhances professional standards and the objectivity of the statistical data. The data produced are of good quality, reliable and relevant," said Dr Paul Cheung, the Singapore Chief Statistician.

National statistical systems face growing data demands in the increasingly complex social and economic environment. They interact with and are increasingly affected by developments in the market-place. Along with the emergence of new products and services, the ways in which productive and distribution activities are organised have also changed. National statistical systems have to respond aptly to these organisational changes through changes and adaptations in the statistical processes for data collection, processing and dissemination.

Issues on respondent relations, data transparency, integrity and relevance as well as the professionalism, credibility and legitimacy of national statistical systems have thus become important concerns. The management of these operational issues constitutes an integral part of governance of national statistical systems.

Challenges for the National Statistical Systems

The challenge to governance of national statistical systems is how best to meet the new demands and, at the same time, ensure confidence and trust in national official statistics.

"The stakes are high. The timely availability of good and reliable information is the foundation for sound policy formulation and effective decision making. Confidence and trust in official statistics is as crucial as confidence and trust in the banking system," declared Dr Cheung.