

## **Partner Report on Support to Statistics (PRESS)**

*An assessment of the usefulness of the PRESS tool for information sharing  
among development partners*

Prepared by ESCAP  
June 2011

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## 1. Background

At its first meeting held in December 2010<sup>1</sup>, the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific (aka ‘the Partnership’) decided that a first step towards the improvement of cooperation and collaboration among partners is to share information. To limit duplication, the group agreed to make full use of the tool applied to prepare the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (PARIS21) *Partner Report on Support to Statistics (PRESS)*<sup>2</sup> for information sharing. It agreed to further analyze PRESS to assess its usefulness for this purpose, leaving the option for improving the tool or share information through other means open. To this end, PARIS21 and the Partnership secretariat (ESCAP) were requested to conduct an assessment of PRESS for the consideration of the Partnership.

The present report contains the results of that assessment. The PARIS21 Secretariat provided information and background on the PRESS process and opened the online questionnaire for ESCAP to test the system. The findings and recommendations of this report are the sole product of the ESCAP Statistics Division.

## 2. Terms of reference

### Objective

The objectives of the assessment were:

- a. To analyze PRESS for its suitability for being used as an information sharing mechanism for the Partnership
- b. To recommend possible improvements of the tool to better suit the needs of the Partnership.

### Scope

The question to be answered by the assessment was whether PRESS was suitable for collecting and disseminating necessary and sufficient data to meet the information sharing needs of the Partnership. Therefore, the assessment focused on the PRESS tool, i.e. the mechanism of collecting and disseminating data, rather than the PRESS reports or the quality of the PRESS data.

Data for the PRESS reports are sourced from OECD’s Creditor Reporting System (CRS) and the PRESS questionnaire. PARIS21 extracts data on support to Statistics from CRS. For organizations that do not use CRS, the PARIS21 Secretariat obtains information on support to statistics through the PRESS questionnaire.

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<sup>1</sup> See annex II for the report of the first meeting of the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.paris21.org/Press>

While the structure and functioning of CRS is of importance to the usefulness of PRESS as an information sharing tool for the Partnership, influencing the broader CRS through recommendations and follow-up actions to the present assessment was considered beyond the reach of the Partnership. Hence, the present assessment does not include CRS, and the effectiveness of follow-up actions to improve PRESS therefore presumes the use by all Partnership members of the PRESS questionnaire for reporting on projects and programmes relevant to the Partnership.

## Organization of work

PARIS21, as the owner of PRESS, supplied materials and technical expertise. ESCAP conducted the PRESS assessment.

## Methodology

A *desk study* of the PRESS tool was complemented by a number of *case studies*, where selected secretariat staff members were asked to report ongoing and future projects using the tool and provide feed-back on observed positives and negatives.

## 3. Overview of PRESS<sup>3</sup>

PARIS21 designed and administers PRESS to provide a snapshot of ongoing statistical support, answering the questions of who, what, where, and how much. The aims of PRESS are to:

- Learn what donors (*i.e.*, bilateral agencies, multilateral institutions, private foundations, and other bodies providing technical or financial support) are doing and plan to do in the statistical field and identify countries or areas of statistics in need of more support;
- Offer this information to donors responsible for giving aid and to countries receiving it; and
- Raise the profile of statistics within the overall context of aid to developing countries.

PRESS is an annual exercise which begins with extraction of data from the OECD's Creditor Reporting System (CRS)<sup>4</sup>. For countries and institutions that do not report to the CRS, the PARIS21 Secretariat obtains data through the PRESS questionnaire (see Annex I).

PARIS21 publishes an annual report with PRESS data. The report summarizes partners' support to statistics by donor, recipient and statistical area. There have been 3 reports for rounds 2008, 2009 and 2010. At the request of PRESS respondents, the PARIS21 Secretariat simplified the questionnaire and converted it from an Excel spreadsheet to an online form for the 2010 PRESS.

PRESS data from each year are available on the PARIS21 website in the form of an excel sheet that uses pivot tables.

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<sup>3</sup> The sources of information for this section are the PRESS website <http://www.paris21.org/Press>, the PRESS reports, and OECD's website <http://www.oecd.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.oecd.org/document/0/0,2340,en\\_2649\\_34447\\_37679488\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/0/0,2340,en_2649_34447_37679488_1_1_1_1,00.html)

The objectives of PARIS21 for developing and using PRESS are:

- To improve donor collaboration on statistical development, especially for the funding of NSDS
- To identify statistical areas receiving little/no support
- To monitor trends in support of statistics
- To allow recipient countries to monitor and follow-up donors' support to statistical development

At the first meeting of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific, the purpose of the Partnership was expressed as: *“Improving the combined impact of capacity building activities through enhance synergies and complementarity among international agencies and donors”*.

From the above two statements, the objectives of the PRESS appear to be well-aligned and in support of the purpose of the Partnership.

### **Creditor Reporting System (CRS)**

CRS Aid Activity database is maintained by OECD to provide a set of readily available basic data that enables analysis on where aid goes, what purposes it serves and what policies it aims to implement. The DAC Secretariat is responsible for data processing, quality control and dissemination. The dimensions of the database include:

- recipient countries (possibility of grouping by continent or by income group)
- donors (grouped into bilateral and multilateral)
- sectors and sub-sectors
- annual commitments / disbursements
- flows: grants, loans, Official Development Assistance
- channels of delivery
- policy markers (gender equality, environment)
- Rio markers (biodiversity, climate change, desertification)

24 donor countries including 23 Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members and some international organizations (IDB, IFAD, IMF, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNECE, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and a few more) report development activities through CRS.

### **Questionnaire**

PRESS respondents who don't report to CRS use an online questionnaire (see Annex I). Users can access the questionnaire on the PARIS21 website by entering their institutional username and password.

The questionnaire collects data by project/programme. That is, a separate form has to be filled out for each project/programme. The PRESS questionnaire comprises three parts:

- i. A general information sheet on the partner,
- ii. An information sheet for each ongoing project/programme that the partner is supporting as a donor or implementer, and

- iii. An information sheet for future activities

The information collected on each project/programme includes the objective, statistical areas supported, time period, the type of assistance provided, the type and amount of funding, problems encountered during implementation, and the institutional contact person.

## **CRESS**

To identify the sources and the levels of funding to the National Statistical Systems (NSSs) of countries, PARIS21 is developing a system to collect information from the recipient's end called CRESS (Country Report on Support to Statistics). CRESS would provide an opportunity to compare the levels of support as indicated by donors through PRESS and the support received as indicated by countries through CRESS.

CRESS is planned to cover activities funded by country resources as well as activities funded by financial and technical partners (FTPs), categorizing the funding according to their origin & type:

- Financing from national sources
- Loan/credits from outside sources
- Grants from FTPs (targeted budget support to a sector, aid projects, or to statistical components of a programme)

## **4. Findings**

This chapter presents the key findings on the components and functioning of PRESS as they emerged from the desk review of PRESS reports and questionnaires and from the feed-back from case studies.

### **PRESS Questionnaire**

- The case studies found the online reporting to be very user-friendly. It takes only a few minutes to report a project using the PRESS online questionnaire.
- The simplicity of the questionnaire is an advantage. All data currently collected are relevant to the functioning of the Partnership, and the response burden is low.
- The case studies demonstrated that target countries may not be fully and finally determined for region-wide projects in the early stages of implementation. This means that for some new projects, this field would be left blank in the questionnaire.
- ESCAP staff, who participated in the testing of PRESS felt that the explanatory notes<sup>5</sup> could be improved. Notes on types of financing approaches are not easily understandable. The note on unique identifier doesn't indicate whether it's an arbitrary code to be chosen by the respondent or it's determined in some other way.
- The explanatory notes do not advise respondents on the recommended approach to classifying projects by statistical area. This may lead to inconsistency in reporting. For

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<sup>5</sup> PRESS methodology <http://www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/PRESS2009-methodology.pdf>

example, one case study found that a planned ESCAP project on gender statistics could be classified as *Gender and special population groups* by its overall theme. It would however also involve *National accounts, non-observed economy, Household surveys, Data analysis* etc.

### *Classification of statistical areas*

- The case studies demonstrated that some projects or programmes are targeted at more than one statistical area. In such cases, information on statistical areas alone would not necessarily provide sufficient information on the project and the partner's role. The lack of possibility to provide disaggregated information on budget (e.g. per statistical area), would make it difficult for others to understand priorities and approaches for this kind of projects.
- In reporting statistical area, main categories are mandatory and subcategories are optional. Without information at the subcategory level, it is difficult for prospective partners or other donors to identify options for collaboration and possible gaps in donor support.
- The classification is very comprehensive. However, new areas of statistical development are continuously emerging. For example, ESCAP's planned activity on informal employment statistics doesn't match any existing category fully.

### *Information on future activities*

- Information on recipient countries for future projects is optional. Such information, even if preliminary, is essential for prospective partners.
- There's no question on project objectives in the future project questionnaire. This information should be possible to complete even in a very early project design phase and would be essential for prospective partners.
- Changing the status of a project from "future" to "ongoing" is easy, allowing respondents to transfer data already entered about a future project to an ongoing project with one click.

### **PRESS Information sharing**

- Currently, PRESS data is disseminated through a report and a database annually. For the purpose of coordination, it is important that information on partners' activities is shared as it emerges.
- PRESS collects the emails of contact person(s) responsible for completing the questionnaire. Currently, this information is not made available to other responding institutions.
- PRESS collects information about whether public documentation/database is available on the aid projects/programmes reported. This information is currently not made available to other responding institutions. For a prospective partner institution, such information would be a good starting point for considering collaboration.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, it is concluded that PRESS is a suitable tool for information sharing among partners on ongoing projects and programmes in the Asia-Pacific region. In order to meet the needs for partners to exchange information on projects and programmes, as it emerges, the current system, which makes information available on an annual basis only, could be improved.

For the purpose of coordination, the Partnership needs to have a common platform to share information on their activities to support statistics development. Unlike the CRS or the PRESS report, which contain data on *what the respondent has done in the past year*; information sharing must be continuous and real-time to serve the needs of the Partnership. For information sharing to be effective, all partners must use the platform to share information as it emerges. One implication is that all partners must report on projects and programmes relevant to the Partnership using the PRESS questionnaire rather than CRS.

Bearing this in mind, the below recommendations are put forward for the consideration of partners.

### *Key recommendations*

1. Partners should be able to update information as it becomes available (already possible) and make such information available to other partners (not possible at the moment). To allow verification at periodic intervals, such a system could be completed with the current annual “official” reporting, possibly through indication of the status of data (tentative, final);
2. In order to ensure that information is available at a sufficient level of detail, the Partnership should consider making the indication of subcategories mandatory for members when reporting on ‘statistical area’ (see Annex I, question 7).
3. A question on the *objective* of future projects and programmes should be included in the PRESS questionnaire.
4. A directory of contacts collected through PRESS should be made available on-line for Partnership members.
5. A directory of links to publically available documents and reports on programmes and projects (ongoing and future) that have been reported through the PRESS questionnaire should be made available online for Partnership members. The Partnership should encourage all members to make such documents and reports available online.
6. Updated information on programmes and projects (as per recommendation 1 above) should be made available in a format that allows partners to filter and view projects and programmes implemented by other partners by recipient, statistical area, project duration, etc.

7. The Partnership should encourage reporting by members on recipient countries, even if the information is tentative. To support this, the PRESS questionnaire could be modified to allow reporting of *expected* recipient countries. For future activities, information on recipient countries should be reported as *tentative/expected* by default. To address possible disclosure or confidentiality issues, this information could be marked as *unofficial* and be used only for information sharing and only among partners, not for the PRESS report. The PRESS report will use information on recipient countries as and when finalized by partners.
8. The Partnership should encourage members to classify reported projects in all relevant categories (by overall theme and individual activities included), and then provide a brief summary to clarify (see also recommendation 11 below).

### *General recommendations*

9. The explanatory notes on using the questionnaire should be improved to make the reporting system fully self-explanatory and prevent inconsistency in reporting by different respondents.
10. While recognizing that the classification of statistical activities used by PRESS is based on an official UNECE classification and approved by the PARIS21 Steering Committee, it is recommended that provision be made in the questionnaire to comment on existing statistical areas or to suggest new statistical areas. The Partnership could contribute to a regular review of the classification, based on inputs from respondents.
11. The questionnaire should allow reporting of a brief summary of each project and programme (overview of expected activities, schedule, clarification of focus and, if possible, disaggregated budget information in cases where multiple statistical areas are indicated, etc.).

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## ANNEX I: PRESS questionnaire

### Sheet 1: General Information Sheet

Name of Financial or Technical Partner:

E - mail(s) of contact person(s) responsible for completing the questionnaire:

Is any further public documentation/database available on the aid projects/programmes reported?

Yes (please indicate how to access)

No

### Sheet 2: Project/Programme Information Sheet for Ongoing Activity, 2007–09

1) Recipient country (ies), sub - region(s) and/or institution(s):

2) Project/Programme name:

3) Unique identifier:

4) What are the main objectives of this project/programme?

5) What is period of Project/Programme?

Year the project/programme was committed or approved:

Year the project/programme ended or is expected to end:

6) What is your role in this project?

lead donor

other donor

implementation

*According to your answer, please precise the name of lead donor or collaborators:*

7) What are the statistical area(s) of the project/programme (main category is mandatory; subcategory is optional)

**Demographic and social statistics**

Population and migration

Labour

Education

- Health
- Income and consumption
- Social protection
- Human settlements and housing
- Justice and crime
- Culture
- Political and other community activities
- Time use

**Economic statistics**

- Macroeconomic statistics, short-term indicators and seasonal adjustments
- National accounts, non-observed economy
- Business statistics
- Sector statistics
  - Agriculture, forestry, fisheries
  - Energy
  - Mining, manufacturing, construction
  - Transport
  - Tourism
  - Banking, insurance, financial statistics
  - Other services
- Government finance, fiscal and public sector statistics
- International trade and balance of payments
- Prices
- Labour cost, productivity and competitiveness
- Science and technology

**Environment and multi-domain statistics**

- Environment
- Regional and small area statistics
- Multi-domain statistics and indicators

- Living conditions, poverty
- Gender and special population groups
- Information society
- Globalisation
- Indicators related to the Millennium Development Goals
- Sustainable development
- Yearbooks and similar compendia

**General statistical items and methodology of data collection, processing, dissemination and analysis**

- Metadata
- Classifications
- Data sources
  - Population and housing censuses; registers of population, dwellings and buildings
  - Agricultural censuses, registers and surveys
  - Household surveys
  - Business registers and surveys
  - Other administrative and non-survey sources
  - Data editing and data linkage
- Data warehousing, output databases, web sites and other use of ICT
- Dissemination, marketing and promotion of statistical literacy
- Statistical confidentiality and disclosure protection
- Data analysis

**Strategic and managerial issues of official statistics at national and international level**

- Institutional frameworks and principles, role of official statistics, statistical law and other legal instruments
- Statistical programmes, priority setting, relationships with users and respondents
  - Statistical programmes in the framework of NSDS
  - All other statistical programmes, priority settings, relationships with users and respondents
- Quality frameworks and evaluation exercises
- Human resources and training

- Technological resources (including standards for electronic data exchange and data sharing)
- Co-ordination of international statistical work

8) What type of support is being provided?

- Financial
- Non-financial

a) *For financial support:*

What is the financing instrument you use?

- Loan/credit
- Grant

What is the financing approach?

- Stand-alone project/programme
- Component of project/programme
- Budgetary support

What is the financing mechanism?

- Not-co-financed
- Parallel financing (specify partners)
- Joint or pooled financing (specify partners)
- Financing through intermediary organization (indicate organization)

What is the commitment amount for statistical component?

Specified amount (in activity documentation)

Estimated amount (by respondent)

Revised amount since activity approval, if applicable

Which currency?

- US dollars
- Euro
- Pound Sterling
- Other (specify)

What is disbursement amount, if available?

Amount of most recent year (specify year)

Total as of last financial/calendar year)

*b) For non - financial support*

What is the cost estimate of this non - financial support?

Which currency?

- US dollars
- Euro
- Pound Sterling
- Other (specify)

*c) For financial and non - financial support*

For what is the support used?

- Technical assistance (technical expertise, consultant services)
- Training
- Goods and equipment
- Infrastructure
- Operating costs (recurrent expenditures)
- Other

What type of technical assistance do you provide?

- Twinning
- Long-term
- Short-term

What kind of goods/equipment do you finance?

9) What problems have been encountered in the implementation of the project/programme (such as timely availability of experts, delays in procurement procedures, availability and capacity of country level staff, etc.)?

10) Can your responses be used for the compilation of a report containing a summary of the results of this survey?

- Yes
- No

## Sheet 3: Information Sheet for Future Activities

1) Recipient Country(ies), sub - region(s), institution(s):

2) Project/Programme name:

3) Unique identifier:

4) What is the status of the Project/Programme?

- Identification stage
- Under preparation/appraisal
- Approval stage

5) What is the expected Period of Project/Programme?

6) What are the statistical area(s) covered?

*Breakdown as in ongoing activity*

7) What is the expected commitment amount?

8) Which currency?

- US dollars
- Euro
- Pound sterling
- Other (specify)

## **ANNEX II: Report of the first meeting of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific**

*14 December 2010 – Bangkok, Thailand*

### **Background**

During the first session of the Committee on Statistics held in February 2009, a side event entitled 'Forum on Statistics Development: Coordinating Support for Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific' took place to galvanize interest and support for launching an informal regional coordination mechanism of all international, regional and sub-regional organizations and bilateral donors concerned with the improvement of statistics in Asia and the Pacific.

At the 40<sup>th</sup> session, in its *Decision 40/112 item (f)*, the United Nations Statistical Commission, member States confirmed the need for such a mechanism, calling for the ESCAP secretariat to "establish an informal mechanism for donor coordination for statistical development in the region, taking into account existing mechanisms, roles and responsibilities".

To this end, the ESCAP secretariat organized the First Meeting of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific on 14 December 2010, to define this Partnership. The meeting, Co-chaired by ADB and UNFPA, was attended by international, regional and sub-regional organizations and bilateral donors that are engaged in statistics development activities in the Asian and the Pacific region, as well as government representatives from Australia, Japan and the Russian Federation.

The Meeting discussed the purpose, membership and organization of work of the Partnership, and outlined the strategic objectives for its work.

### **Outcome**

Participants agreed to establish the Partnership with the purpose of improving the combined impact of capacity building activities through enhanced coordination, synergy and complementarity among international agencies and donors.

Partners emphasized that support to the development of statistics in the region should focus on the outcomes to be achieved rather than on inputs they provide to countries. They also recognized that coordination among agencies should be realistic and pragmatic by founding the Partnership on solid and gradually increasing building-blocks.

On this basis, the Partnership agreed on its draft Terms of Reference (ToR) outlining its purpose, role and key functions, composition and structure, and the organization of work.

### **Strategic objectives**

The Partnership supported the strategic direction and priorities outlined in the note prepared by the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics entitled 'Proposed strategic directions of the Committee on Statistics' ([www.unescap.org/stat/cst/2/CST2-2E.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/stat/cst/2/CST2-2E.pdf)). Following these lines, Partners agreed that the strategic objectives for the work of the Partnership would be:

- Advocacy: The importance of engaging governments across line-ministries and policy-makers to highlight the need for investing in statistics was emphasized.
- Strengthening National Statistics Offices' role as the leader of National Statistical Systems: It was recognized that each partner has an important role to play in advocating for better coordination of National Statistical Systems with government officials from their respective counterpart ministries.
- Modernizing countries' statistical information systems: Modernization of statistical information systems was seen as particularly important for increasing the access by users to available data.
- Coordination in the development of core sets of indicators in the areas of social, economic, environmental and population statistics.
- Promoting the improvement and use of administrative data records for statistical purposes.
- Coordination of statistical training in the region.

Partners agreed to align its work to the decisions and priorities outlined by the Committee on Statistics, and to align efforts and cooperate with the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities at the global level.

It was further agreed to report progress made by the Partnership towards meeting its strategic objectives to the Committee on Statistics.

#### **Next steps**

1. The secretariat agreed to revise the ToR based on suggestions and comments made by the group and share it for final comments by 24 December 2010.
2. The Partnership decided that a first step towards the improvement of cooperation and collaboration is to share information. To avoid duplication, the group agreed to make full use of the PARIS21 Partner Report on Support to Statistics (PRESS) as a basis for information sharing. It agreed to further analyze the PRESS to assess its usefulness for this purpose, leaving the option for improving this tool or share information through other means open. To this end, PARIS21 and the Secretariat will conduct an analysis of the PRESS exercise and its data by the end of March 2011.
3. Partners requested that the secretariat in consultation with the Co-chairs, prepares a document outlining the strategic objectives to be pursued by the Partners, and share this with the group in early 2011.
4. The group requested the Co-chairs to decide, with the assistance of the secretariat, the date and place for the next meeting.

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