Abstract

SPC is taking the lead in setting-up standard business registers in the Pacific, with Fiji providing the South-South cooperation:

- Adoption of business registers in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories allows accurate, up-to-date and consistent frames to be used for business-related statistical collections, as well as allows a range of collections to have consistently identified and classified units.

- To have a standard set-up throughout the Pacific has the advantage of business register staff in countries helping each other/exchanging views – important in the Pacific where many countries have small statistical offices with high staff turnover.

Microsoft Access is used as the platform since staff in most of the countries is familiar with this. The program contains data fields to cater for identification, stratification and demographic variables and has many other features.
SPC and the Australian Bureau of Statistics have jointly produced a manual titled Pacific Business Register Development Guide as part of their efforts to provide leadership for statistical development in the Pacific Island Countries & Territories. This manual refers to general Business Register practices used by NSOs throughout the world, many of whom work according to the recommendations of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers.

The way in which this guide is applied to local situations depends on a number of factors, including:

- The standing of the NSO in the business community, and the willingness of businesses to cooperate in the production of statistics,
- The level of mutuality between government agencies,
- The level of non-observed activity in the local economy, and
- The structure and operation of local tax and regulations.
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I. Introduction

The Statistics for Development Division (SDD) of the Pacific Community (SPC) serves 22 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) scattered across the Pacific Ocean. The islands are diverse in size, culture and economy. Papua New Guinea is the largest with a land area of 462,840 km² and a population of around 7.4 million people. Tokelau has the smallest land area of 12 km² (Population of 1,200), and Pitcairn has the smallest population of 60 people (47 km² of land) [1].

The National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in the Pacific vary in size. In 2011, 4 NSOs had a staff contingent of 25 staff or more (24%) and 8 had less than 5 staff (47%) [2]. The situation in most PICTs has not changed much since then.

Most of the NSOs lack skills to perform specialized tasks like setting-up a Central Statistical Business Register (CSBR) thus seek SPCs assistance to do so. To strengthen Economic Statistics in the Pacific, an important component of which is the setting-up of the CSBR, SPC has a mandate from the Pacific Leaders and is guided by the Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy, more commonly known as TYPSS. SPC works in collaboration with other partner agencies in the Pacific and also supports the South-South collaboration between countries to provide technical support to PICTs.

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1 Melanesia comprises 5 Pacific Island countries and territories: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, New Caledonia and Vanuatu.


Polynesia comprises 10 Pacific Island countries and territories: American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Pitcairn and Wallis and Futuna

2 Source: SPCs 2015 Pocket Statistical Summary. Note: Data on all the PICTs can be obtained from the 2015 Pocket Summary as well as from www.spc.int/prism.
The CSBR is an important infrastructure needed by NSOs in the Pacific for the production of good quality and timely business statistics that are needed by users for different purposes. Having a central CSBR also allows NSOs to streamline its operations, which is extremely important for the small Pacific NSOs, even the bigger ones, to be able to produce other statistics.

With many requests and not many staff to provide assistance and also challenged by sheer distance between countries, the most effective way for SPC to serve its many members is by striving for greater harmonisation of statistical standards, classifications and systems, like the CSBR, to enable PICTs to use common tools for statistical collections. These are then adapted to suit the country.

II. Setting-up Central Statistical Business Registers in the Pacific

The development of CSBRs in the Pacific NSOs follows a framework that describes the broad concepts that are to be considered in its development. The framework is necessary to make Pacific NSOs understand what a CSBR is, what it does and how to update and use it. Refer to Figure 1.
SPC begins by assisting countries first establish a **purpose** for the CSBR and concludes by signing off after completing the set-up and handover of a country-specific draft manual on the CSBR to the country.

Source: Pacific Business Register Development Guide
A. Purpose of having a central statistical business register in the Pacific NSOs

The central SBRs in the Pacific NSOs contain structural and classification information about each business operating in the formal economy\(^3\) of a country.

The need to have a central business register is for coherence, efficiency and functionality and can be explained with a Venn diagram:

**Figure 2: Advantages of having a central statistical business register**

Source: Pacific Business Register Development Guide

1. **Common frame**

The CSBR provides a common frame from which individual survey frames can be sourced.

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\(^3\) The formal economy consists of institutional units that produce goods and services in accordance with the local business registration and taxation laws. It excludes the non-observed economy.
2. **Common definition**

It provides common definitions which then allow the same interpretation of the terminology across all surveys thus making the data more comparable.

3. **Scope alignment**

It ensures that scopes across collections are consistent by eliminating gaps and overlaps.

4. **Maintenance strategies**

It is easier as well as time-saving to update and do maintenance on one register than several separate registers.

5. **Timing**

When major changes happen in the economy e.g. a government business is privatised, only the CSBR will need to be updated and this will flow through to all statistical collections in the same reference period.

6. **Methodology**

Register maintenance and frame production methodologies is the same for all business collections.

7. **Leading indicator**

Expectations of the future statistical outputs can be made by studying the trends in the CSBR.

8. **Quality assurance**

When procedures on quality assurance are performed on a CSBR and the common frame, all business statistical collections are ensured the same level of quality assurance.
9. Non-economic collections

Frames for business collections that fall outside the area of purely economic measures e.g. energy statistics can be sourced from the CSBR. Results will be more comparable than if separate registers were used.

10. Standards

When economic standards such as classifications are implemented on a CSBR, they flow through to all business statistical collections.

11. Expertise

Operating a CSBR allows the development of specialized skills with respect to identification, classification and characterisation of businesses in the economy.

12. Data Security

All data collected by NSOs are done so under the Statistics Acts. CSBR ensures data security.

13. Eliminate effort duplication

It is more efficient and economical to maintain a CSBR than maintaining a separate register for each collection.

14. Provider burden

Rather than burden businesses with multiple statistical collections, provider burden is better managed through synchronized collections using a CSBR.
15. Access to administrative data

NSOs have a central contact that negotiates access to administrative data for the update of the CSBR rather than having multiple contacts for different survey frames. It is also advantages to hold different sources of administrative data in a single place, it enriches the CSBR.

16. Business demography

A CSBR is a central source of information on business births and deaths, industry counts, and other demographic measures, for the whole economy.

17. Confrontation of national accounts

Expectations can be formed based on changes to the register (which is forward-looking), and these expectations can be used to confront the National Accounts (which are backward-looking).

B. Governance and Control

1. Confidentiality

The CSBR is governed by the Statistics Act prevailing in the country. The sources the data are sourced from for the CSBR, as well as its outputs contain sensitive data and to maintain the integrity and reputation of their NSOs, Pacific statisticians control access to sensitive data to avoid breaches of confidentiality.

2. Strategic planning

SPC encourages countries to have corporate documents specific to the CSBR (such as a vision and a mission statement, values and strategic direction) so that there is common understanding of the purpose and the operations of the CSBR.
3. **Documentation**

Documentation is necessary for all to have the same understanding and do the same thing:

a) **History of the CSBR development**

SPC encourages PICTs to document the history of the development of the CSBR as this will help retain corporate knowledge, particularly helpful when staff change. This should be appended as further developments take place with reasons why decisions have been made.

b) **Definitions of data items**

The concepts and definitions used by the sources and the clients are consistent. Where this is not possible, the differences are clearly explained and documented. Metadata are defined and described.

c) **Business process mapping**

Process maps are in place to help staff better understand information flows, and their role in the context of the statistical cycle. The maps effectively communicate CSBR processes, ideas, and innovations to senior managers and external stakeholders. Two examples of how process maps are used in the Pacific NSOs are given in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Business process maps**

**Example 1: Processing a questionnaire on business operation**

- Mail out business questionnaire
- Mail questionnaire is returned
- Check all questions are answered
- Check for duplicate entries in CSBR
- Enter data into system
- Stamp form and place in archive

**Example 2: Typical reporting line for a business register unit**

- Central Statistical Business Register Officer
- Central Statistical Business Register Manager
- Division Manager
- Head of NSO (Government Statistician)

Source: Pacific Business Register Development Guide
d) Business register manual

After the CSBR has been set up in a country and before signing-off, SPC assists the countries to produce their own business register manual that describes the purpose of their CSBR; the statistical units used; the classifications used; the data sources used; step-by-step procedures for collecting and editing data; step-by-step procedures for using the business register database; how common frame snapshots can be produced; how the quality of the business register is assured and reported etc.

e) Memorandum of understanding for accessing administrative data

SPC also supports countries in their negotiation with administrative data sources to obtain reliable data for their CSBR. They also assist countries draw up the memorandum of understanding between the NSO and the data provider covering the terms and conditions under which data can be used, the frequency at which the data will be supplied and the agreed level of the quality of the data supplied.

f) Custodianship

The custodian of the CSBR in the Statistics Office is the Officer in-charge of the CSBR. This person obtains raw structural data from providers. He provides survey frames. He also provides information to the management.

C. Uses of the CSBR

The main use of the CSBR in the Pacific is to supply survey frames for all business collections. Other than this, it also serves as the main source of business demography by keeping track of business creations, closures, and structural changes brought about by mergers, take-overs, break-ups, split-offs and restructuring. The CSBR can be used in its own right as a leading
economic indicator since it contains many different economic variables – turnover, employment etc.

D. Users of the CSBR

Different statistical collections across the statistical organisation are able to use the CSBR to create their survey frames. Refer to figure 4.

**Figure 4: Areas of the NSOs that use the central BR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject matter area</th>
<th>Uses the BR for identifying and characterising……</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production statistics</td>
<td>… establishments that produce goods and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour statistics</td>
<td>… enterprises that have employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism statistics</td>
<td>… establishments that operate with the tourism industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research &amp; Development statistics</td>
<td>… enterprises that undertake research &amp; development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental statistics</td>
<td>… establishments with certain environmental attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Trade statistics</td>
<td>… enterprises that trade internationally in goods and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government statistics</td>
<td>… enterprises that belong to the government sector</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pacific Business Register Development Guide

The officer in-charge of the CSBR uses it to produce statistics on business demography: counts of businesses by industry, mergers, split-offs and identification of new, dormant and ceased businesses.

The national accountant uses outputs of many statistical collections in the compilation of national accounts. Unusual movements or changes in national accounts are sometimes caused by changes in the survey frames. By investigating the CSBR the national accountant is able to solve such issues.
E. Register update sources

1. Administrative data vs survey data

   a) Use of administrative data

   Data for compiling and maintaining a CSBR in PICTs are generally sourced from organisations like the Registrar of Companies and the tax departments. Administrative sources provide necessary identification (and some stratification) variables about businesses, reduces the burden on respondents and almost always comes free. The issue however is the use of multiple administrative sources which gives rise to inconsistent information across sources. When this happens, the details are always confirmed with the business before inserting it into the CSBR.

   b) Use of survey data

   When insufficient information is received from the administrative sources, the NSOs send out specially designed questionnaires to the businesses to get more information.

   The CSBR is also updated by the NSOs through the establishment surveys they conduct. Special Amendment forms have been designed which the survey officers fill out about the update that needs to be done and these are sent to the CSBR in-charge, who after thorough verification takes the necessary action.

   Both the sources are assessed for data quality. They should address attributes like relevance (scope, reference period, level of detail, classification standards); timeliness (frequency, timing relative to processing and outputs); accuracy (quality standards employed by the source organisation); coherence (comparison across data items, comparison across time periods); interpretability (availability of assistance and explanatory information); and accessibility (ongoing availability).
The reason for such tight quality control is because the quality of the CSBR affects statistical surveys that are used in compiling national accounts.

2. Primary, secondary and tertiary sources

In PICTs BR sources can be grouped into:

a) Primary Sources

Primary sources identify businesses. The businesses are distinguishable (separate legal entity, distinct from its owners), unique (identified once) and tangible (interacts with the real world, and is not purely a legal construct).

b) Secondary sources

Secondary sources describe the characteristics of businesses. This includes attributes such as life status (is the business operating, dormant or ceased), relative size (number of employees, turnover, etc.), type of business entity (company, sole proprietor, etc.), ownership (local, foreign), location (physical location, mail address, state, province, etc.), and contact information.

c) Tertiary sources

Tertiary sources provide transactional information about businesses. They include information such as volume data, balance sheet data, financial performance data and payroll data.

Reliable data sources exist for the primary source in all PICTs who have the CSBR. As the CSBR develops, and reliable data sources become available, secondary and tertiary sources are integrated.

3. Types of variables

The data obtained from the sources are grouped into:
a) Identification variables

Names, addresses and the legal form of the businesses are examples of identification variables. The unique identifier (Business number/establishment number) is an identification variable that stays with the business throughout its life.

b) Stratification variable

Type of activity (principal, secondary and if available, ancillary activities), size (persons, employed and turnover) and geographical location are examples of stratification variables.

c) Demographic variables

Date of creation and date of cessation are examples of demographic variables. Dormant businesses also form a part of the demographic variable.

d) Relationship variables

Relationship between the enterprise and the establishment is an example of relationship variable.

F. Statistical units

Businesses vary in their legal and accounting structures therefore a standard model has been used to define, identify, and classify businesses consistently in the Pacific. The model used provides definitions of the statistical units used, describes the relationships between the statistical unit types, and identifies the information held about each type of unit on the CSBR.

1. Establishment

An establishment is the most basic statistical unit that is used, and is defined as having single ownership, single economic activity, and single physical location.
2. **Enterprise**

An enterprise is a statistical unit which consists of a legal entity which operates one or more establishments.

3. **The relationship between Establishments and Enterprises**

There are only two possible conceptual combinations of Establishments and Enterprises. Refer to Figure 5.

*Figure 5: Possible combinations of Establishments and Enterprises*

(1) A single-unit enterprise operates only one establishment.

(2) A multi-unit enterprise operates more than one establishment.

Source: Pacific Business Register Development Guide

G. **Classifications**

Latest recommended classifications are used to describe units on the CSBR according to their productive economic activity, legal status, and institutional sector. This allows consistent treatment of businesses across economic collections.
1. **Classifying by industry**

The regional classification, Pacific Standard Industrial Classification (PACSIC) which is derived from the United Nations International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) Rev.4, is used for classifying establishments according to their economic activity. This regional standard enables countries that are setting-up the CSBR to adopt the latest industry classification which, if a regional standard had not been available would have been somewhat difficult.

   a) **Use of National Classifications**

Some countries have compiled their national classification e.g. Tonga Standard Industrial Classification (TSIC), Papua New Guinea Standard Industrial Classification (PNGSIC) or the Vanuatu Standard Industrial Classification VanSIC) using PACSIC. The codes used in the national classifications are the same as those used in PACSIC, but only those activities specific to the country is contained in the national versions.

   b) **Secondary activity**

In cases where a statistical unit has more than one activity, the treatment in the CSBR depends on the record-keeping practices of the unit in the PICTs. If separate accounts are available for the secondary activity, the unit is classified according to their most significant activity, with the secondary activity (and its % contribution) recorded on the unit record. The same rule applies for ancillary activity.

2. **Classifying by type of legal organisation (TOLO)**

Businesses are classified according to the type of legal organisation e.g. sole trader. Although a list of the types of legal organisations common in the Pacific region has been compiled by SPC, this list is not considered an exhaustive list and government agencies (e.g. the tax office or
registrar of companies) in countries are consulted to ensure that classifications align with those used across government.

3. Classifying by Institutional Sector

Classifying by institutional sector e.g. non-financial corporations, effectively divides the economy into institutional sectors, and groups together economic units which have similar economic functions.

4. Classifying by geographical location of businesses

Where PICTs organisations have a developed geographical classification system say, for determining population census enumeration areas, it made sense to use this same classification in the business register since modern statistical data usage has created a demand for greater geospatial capability for business registers. Thus for some countries in the Pacific each establishment can be viewed using a mapping tool.

H. Frames

The unit-level data in the CSBR changes constantly. This gives rise to coherence issues when survey frames are drawn from the register at different points in time. For example, the different frames may contain the same business with different classifications.

1. Snapshots

To ensure that all economic collections are describing the same economy, snapshots of the CSBR are created at regular intervals e.g. quarterly. The periodic snapshot is used to create the survey frames.
2. Management information, quality audits and data validations

Periodic snapshots allow the comparison of the CSBR at different points in time. This enables the CSBR to undertake quality measures, audits, and validations across the various time periods. It also allows CSBR to produce information for the NSO management that describes changes to the composition of the CSBR. Refer to Figure 6.

**Figure 6: CSBR Management Information at end of Quarter Xxx 20XX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Counts of businesses</th>
<th>Counts of changes to:</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>Dormant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A – Agriculture, Forestry &amp; Fishing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B – Mining &amp; Quarrying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C – Manufacturing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pacific Business Register Development Guide

I. Local Economy

The CSBR gives users a good insight into the local economy by way of providing total number of businesses operating and of them the significant contributors to the economy, the types of production activities the businesses are engaged in and of that which are the key industries, domestic based businesses that have a foreign ownership, the geographic spread of the businesses and many more.

J. Profiling

For larger PICTs in particular, if they are not able to profile every business the recommendation is to profile large/complex businesses because they are more likely to have complex multi-establishment structures and also because they contribute significantly to the economy. Many PICTs, including large ones like Fiji, are able to profile every business.
There are two approaches used to update business profiles. One is a more routine approach, say, every year or every second year, and the other is a trigger approach that indicates a change might have occurred. Triggers can be from survey feedback, daily newspapers and media articles, unexpected changes in administrative data, legislative changes and observed real-world changes.

Profiling leads to long-term relationships between the NSO and business provider and reduces statistical reporting burden.

K. Quality assurance

The information produced by the CSBR has to be quality assured for use in business surveys and this is done in several ways.

1. Stock quality measures

Stock quality measure is an indicator of the quality of the CSBR at a point in time. It checks the snapshot in its own right, without regard to previous ones for blank data fields, invalid classification codes, contradictory combinations of classification codes – for example, where a business has a private sector institutional classification and a public sector activity classification and duplicates.

2. Flow quality measures

Flow quality measure compares the new snapshot with previous ones for counts of births and deaths of businesses on the register, counts of different types of statistical units, identification of units with large changes in stratification variables and identification of significant classification changes.
3. **Quality Gates**

Quality gates comprise a set of acceptance criteria at predetermined points in the CSBR production process that has to be met for the production to continue. Refer to figure 7.

**Figure 7 – Examples of Quality Gates in Business Register processing**

In the example,

- Quality Gate 1 (QG1) is cleared and processing continues
- Quality Gate 2 (QG2) is not cleared, and must be investigated and fixed before processing can continue.

Source: Pacific Business Register Development Guide

**L. Information Technology**

Microsoft Access is being used as the platform for setting up the CSBR in the Pacific since staff in most countries is familiar with it.

However, countries if they desire can use a more sophisticated platform, but the suggestion from SPC to PICTs is to know well and have control of the platform being used rather than have a system set-up by an external organisation/another country which staff is not familiar with. Many a time such arrangements don’t work, and in the Pacific such systems have not worked.
Although training is initially provided, the knowledge and skill don’t get fully transferred. The Pacific NSOs also experience a high staff turnover so the new person taking over may not get the desired skill transfer from the one exiting.

For the Pacific CSBR, Microsoft Access has been used successfully. It has the capacity, capability, it is reliable and the technical support can be provided in-house, it is compatible with administrative sources and other corporate systems, accessible and as a database, secure. Access is also anticipated to meet future needs to accommodate the CSBR as the economy grows, plus the budgetary needs to maintain the system will be able to be met. Like Excel and Word, Access is a Microsoft Office tool that will not phase out but improve with newer versions while retaining backwards compatibility.

M. Review of the CSBR

SPC recommends and will assist PICTs to periodically review their CSBR concepts, procedures, and technologies in response to changes in stakeholder requirements, availability of new technology, development of new concepts and standards on a corporate or international level, availability of new administrative data sources and changes in the availability of existing data sources.

III. Conclusion

The setting-up of standardized CSBRs in the PICTs is the best way forward in the region.

The countries get a system that allows accurate, up-to-date and consistent frames to be used for business-related statistical collections, as well as allows a range of collections to have consistently identified and classified units.
Because the set-up is similar, the countries through networking have the advantage of staff helping each other/exchanging views – important in the Pacific where many countries have small statistical offices with high staff turnover.

Training being provided for the establishment of the standard CSBR has strengthened staff skills and like Fiji Bureau of Statistics which is providing the South-South collaboration, other NSOs in the region will be able to do that soon.

Having standardized the CSBR for the region also frees up a little of SPCs time to look at strengthening other areas of economic statistics like international trade, classifications, prices etc.

As part of their effort to provide leadership for statistical development in PICTs, SPC and the Australian Bureau of Statistics have jointly produced a broad guide to assist the development and improvement of business registers in Pacific. The manual refers to general business register practices used by NSOs throughout the world, many of whom work according to the recommendations of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers. However, not every recommendation in this manual is suitable for all PICTs, and some of the information has been adapted to suit local circumstances. The Manual ensures that:

a) development progresses according to global best practice; and

b) development occurs consistently and harmoniously within the Pacific region to allow better statistical comparability across borders and future cooperation between NSOs in the region. [3]
IV. References

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