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## **Paper on Meeting challenges of Strengthening Statistics in Cambodia**

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### **1. Background**

Cambodian Statistical System benefited from the projects on Statistical System Development in Cambodia financed by ADB and UNDP since 1992. This was the first Statistics project in Cambodia after Khmer Rouge. In 1992 when DOS started the first project of ADB and UNDP, its staff strength was around 40 staff at central level and 450 staff at sub-national level (provinces and districts). Until recently, the significant donors to NIS Cambodia are Japan (Government of Japan and JICA), Sida and UNFPA. Other donors include UNICEF, FAO. The UNSD provided active participation of NIS staff in international workshop, seminars and meetings. At the regional level, ESCAP and SIAP play important role in training of NIS staff. ASEAN will also strengthen ASEAN Framework of Cooperation in Statistics (2010-2015).

In Cambodia, according to the Statistics Law enacted in May 2005, the NIS is the Directorate General of the Ministry of Planning but the technical independence is ensured by statistical legislation. Functioning of the National Statistical System (NSS) has been fully effected since January 2007 by sub-decree on Organization and Functioning of NSS: The Statistics Advisory Council (SAC) and Statistical Coordination Committee (SCC) was established. The Statistics Master Plan (SMP) 2008-2015 was approved by SAC in April 2007 and now was finalized mid-term review (MTR) in 2012. The Sub-decree on Economic Census 2011 in force on 26 August 2009. The Sub-decree on Designated Official Statistics in force on 19 July 2010. NIS has opened policies, NIS website launched in December 2000 and expanded from time to time. NIS disseminates its products to users in various forms including on line dissemination especially 2008 population census and through Data Users Service Center (DUSC), opened to public and mobile teams for dissemination of important products ( censuses, CDHS, CAMInfo) to provinces.

### **2. Current Status of the National Statistical System**

#### **2.1 Components of the national statistical system**

The NSS in Cambodia is highly decentralised and the system is defined in the Statistics Law and related Sub-decrees. The Statistics Law was enacted in 2005 and related Sub-decree on the organisation and functioning of the NSS was fully in effect since 2007. In 2010 the Sub-

decree on Designated Official Statistics was approved. The legislative framework – the Statistics Law and the Sub-decrees – gives overall good basis for making the NSS work well and to support the working process.

A solid government funding for the designated official statistics will ensure a sustainable national statistical system. As long as the majority of financing of the NSS is made by donors, censuses and surveys will be undertaken sometimes ad hoc.

In 2011 there were a total of 996 people engaged in official statistics production. The NIS has about 314 staff members at MoP central level and 315 staff at provincial and district offices. There is about 367 staff involved in statistical activities in line ministries and the NBC.

During the review of the SMP in 2012 there have been meetings with major donors and many line ministries. These meetings and discussions have again proved the need for a system of regular meetings or workshops in order to strengthen the NSS. It is also of great importance to set up systems for regular communication between the RGC, NIS and line ministries as users and producers and also other users. One system should be consisting of meetings and workshops with users to determine statistical needs and suggestions about how it should be prioritized and financed, and another involving the RGC for discussions about the identified needs of official statistics and how it should be financed and prioritized. This is in line with the ACSS Committee Session 2 in Siem Reap, Cambodia, where the users and producers of statistics were stressed.

## **2.2 Strengths and weaknesses of infrastructure of the national statistical system**

The mid-term review of the SMP shows that some of the major weaknesses that were addressed from the very beginning still exist. The infrastructure and institutional arrangements provided by the Statistics Law are in some ways adequate, but in others not. Examples are the lack of full autonomy, funding and budgetary independence of the NIS and official statistics. The systems for communication, planning and follow up, coordination and consultation arrangements, must still be strengthened for the NSS to be effectively integrated with its decentralised system.

The legislative framework covers vast parts of making the NSS work well and gives good basis for the statistical and coordination work.

As statistics is a part of the infrastructure of the society, statistics production must have up-to-date support for what kind of statistics shall be produced, by and for whom. The legislative framework must support the working processes and be clear about responsibilities.

During the last years there have been a lot of efforts in strengthening the statistics production by training and on technical assistance and in management support. There are still huge gaps between the level of skills and techniques used, for a sustainable statistics production and for NIS to fulfill its role as a competence center in statistics production.

The censuses and surveys will improve the information about the economic situation in Cambodia a great deal.

In the education sector MEYS has a large database with administrative data (EMIS), but for private sector and non-formal education the situation is unknown.

The UNSD project on dissemination of national development indicators especially for the core indicators of NSDP are now successfully implemented in 2012 using CAMInfo and SDMX as tools to send these indicators and metadata to the UN and other users. The project may be expanded to cover also 73 additional indicators of NSDP monitoring.

### **2.3 Skill levels and training**

The improvement in the quality of the NIS staff has continued. The number of staff with at least a master's degree was 34 in 2011. The increase is mainly due to younger staff at NIS having a higher degree from a Cambodian university and not through overseas training e.g. Philippines, as was the case in 2006.

The training unit is no longer running due to lack of resources. Instead the different donor projects conduct separate in-house training or use local companies to build up the capacity. The long-term donor projects at NIS between 2007 and 2012 are run by JICA, UNFPA, UNICEF and Sida. All donors have conducted training to improve the capacity and to make sure NIS is able to carry out the tasks in the different censuses and surveys. There is, however, need of coordinating the training to make the capacity building sustainable and to use the resources more efficiently.

In 2010/2011 NIS carried out a competence inventory among the producers of official statistics (NIS not included). Of the respondents only one third of the staff seems to have enough skills to carry out the tasks in a statistical unit and the number of staff with higher statistical skills is not enough for producing statistics. There is also a huge competence gap in ICT and English. The capacity in line ministries to produce official statistics is much lower than in the NIS. A few line ministries have had technical assistance and enough resources to produce statistics, but most need much more training and more government funding for its activities.

### **2.4 Statistical work programs of NIS**

The statistical work programs of NIS can be summarized as follows:

#### **2.4.1 Censuses and surveys**

**Updated and Indicative Timetable for Censuses and Household Surveys, 2008-2015 according to the mid-term review SMP October 2012**

	Key policy steps		Censuses	Surveys		
2006	NSDP 2006-2010 starts				2006	
2007	Continuous monitoring of the indicators for NSDP			Cambodia Scio-Economic Survey (CSES) annually (small sample 3,600 households 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011)  Modules: Income and expenditure (Diary and recall data) Employment Housing Education and literacy Health Agriculture Victimization Migration	2007	
2008			Population census		2008	
2009			Prepare NSDP update 2009-2013		Report on MDGs	CSES 2009 large sample (12,000 households)
2010		Report on MDGs		Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2010 (CDHS)	2010	
2011	NSDP update 2009-2013 starts		Economic Census		2011	
2012	Annual progress report on NSDP – CMDG indicators			CSES annually (small sample 2012, 2013, 2015)	2012	
2013	Prepare NSDP 2014-2018		Agriculture census	Modules: Income and expenditure (only recall data) Employment Housing Education and literacy Health Agriculture Victimization	Cambodia Inter-censal Population Survey (CIPS) 2013	2013
2014	NSDP 2014-2018 begins	Report on MDGs			CSES 2014 large sample (Diary and recall data)	2014
2015					Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2015 (CDHS)	2015
2016				Light CSES with rotating modules 2016 – beyond	2016	

#### **2.4.2 Maintenance of registers**

JICA has assisted NIS in conducting an establishment listing in 2009, a business pilot survey and a economic census in 2011. The information collected in the listing and economic census could be used in the preparation of a business register. However, this is not in the scope of the JICA project and no other donor has shown an interest in setting up a business register. This is a large exercise and as mentioned in the current SMP the register must be kept up-to-date. Nevertheless, the Statistics Law requires NIS to establish a register and NIS should try to find resources from RGC and donors to start up this work in the future.

#### **2.4.3 Administrative sources of line ministries**

The collection of and use of administrative data is done in some of the line ministries. In some areas there are concerns about the quality of data collected as there are few standards and there are specific skills needed in use of administrative data. Improvements have been made and the further use of the combination of survey data and administrative data is a challenge for a more efficient use of data. Improved quality also comes with use of the data and the systems by policymakers, statisticians and officials at all levels. Further quality improvements can be at hand when the code of conduct is in place and more standardised working procedures are in use. The concerns about timeliness of information from administrative sources can be reduced by a dialogue with providers and users. The use of administrative data that complements survey data to produce key statistics, and a cross-agency dissemination strategy for those statistics is important.

#### **2.4.4 Dissemination at NIS**

At NIS there is a Data Users Service Center (DUSC), which provides and supports the dissemination of statistical data to data users and the public. Publications produced by NIS and some databases from various sources, such as CSES, CDHS, Population Census and Economic Census and some publications from line ministries are available on the service through this center.

NIS website provides a central role in documentation and dissemination of official statistics of Cambodia. Recently, the website interface and its content have been revised. Now publications, such as national accounts, CPI and other statistical reports (e.g. CSES, Population Census and other statistical subject matters) are available for downloading.

Through the website, users have access to CAMInfo, which is a web-based dissemination and visualization tool that enable users to generate maps, charts and tables from the underlying data. With an online platform, the CAMInfo database provides users, i.e. government, development partners, researchers etc access to the most current socio-economic data, where the data derives from various sources, such as censuses, surveys and government sectors. CAMInfo provides access to indicators organized by sectors, goals, themes and other monitoring frameworks.

NIS initiated a project in 2011, supported by United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), called “Improving the Collation, Availability and Dissemination of National Development Indicators, including MDGs”. The project objective was to improve the accessibility to and visibility of national development indicators between country and international levels, by establishing a single portal for development indicators at the country level and bringing their indicators up to the international level. The project is based on the existing CAMInfo database system and the indicator framework for monitoring the progress of NSDP/CMDG. In the project, NSDP core indicators and their metadata were standardized and enhanced to comply with international standards.

### **3 Constraints and measures to meet challenges**

Major constraints for the work on NIS and for several of the designated statistical units are the relatively low level of budget, the low salaries/allowances for employees, low level of skills and the need for improved coordination. The infrastructure and institutional arrangements made are in some ways adequate, in others not. Examples are the minor government funding, better dialogue with stakeholders about prioritization and coordination, and the importance to introduce a system for cost calculations for the statistics production within a decentralized system.

To fulfill the goal for the NSS due to the Statistics Law and the Sub-decrees, the SMP and other plans; there must be proper funding, efficient methods and techniques as well as skilled and motivated people for the production of official statistics. A well functioning system for the production of high quality statistics produced by skilled people in the NSS and especially at NIS must be sustainably financed by government funds. Therefore, the system of official statistics cannot rely on ad hoc donor funding in the long run and must be properly and sustainably funded by the RGC. The goal to have total government funding by 2016 must be reached.

To increase the efficiency in the NSS, the salary/allowances problem must be solved. Civil servants employed at NIS and other statistics unit must be offered salaries/allowances so they can focus on their government work and do not take additional outside work in order to survive. The Priority Mission Group (PMG) was terminated in 2010 and there is no new scheme implemented other than the Priority Operating Costs (POC) supported only by donors. The POC was terminated on 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2012 and a new long term scheme should urgently be launched. A public administrative reform has been proposed, but not yet implemented.

For the National Statistical System to be sustainable, the two constraints already mentioned above must be solved by the RGC.

### **4 CONCLUSIONS**

Some of the most important things for building and maintaining a sustainable system for official statistics production are legislative framework, long and short term goals/plans, good and well implemented management tools and communication processes as well as systems and tools for statistics production (methodology, ICT), stable funding, skilled and devoted employees.

Two major problems at present are the unstable funding and the very low salaries currently for civil servants. The present salary system is not sustainable. In the absence of action by RGC to sharply increase the salaries/allowances of government employees, statistics staff will continue to depend on incentive payments from donors and on additional employment, which make the work in the NSS less efficient.

The NSS, and in particular the NIS, have made considerable progress over the last years in developing systems and outputs. The statistical capacity of the NIS and in the NSS as a whole needs to be further strengthened, as envisaged in the SMP and addressed in the review.

There is need to strengthen a system of regular meetings or workshops in order to strengthen NSS. It is also of great importance to set up systems for regular communication between the RGC, NIS and line ministries as users and producers and also other users. One system should be consisting of meetings and workshops with users to determine statistical needs and suggestions about how it should be prioritized and financed, and another involving the RGC for discussions about the identified needs of official statistics and how it should be financed and prioritized.

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