

ISI morning seminar

Are the current NSO business models still relevant?

Wednesday, 8 March 2017, 8:15-9:30 am
UN Headquarters New York, Conference room 7

The International Statistical Institute (ISI) organised a side event during the 48th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. The event took place on 8 March 2017 at the UN Headquarters in New York; organised and chaired by Irena Križman, ISI Vice-President.



Speakers were:

- Bert Kroese, Deputy Director General, Statistics Netherlands
- Genovefa Ružič, Director General, SURS, Slovenia and Chair of the ESSC Partnership Group
- Julio Alfonso Santaella Castell, President INEGI Mexico
- Albina Chuwa, Director-General of Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, who was unable to participate in person; her presentation was summarized by Lidia Bratanova.

Discussant:

- Lidia Bratanova, Director, UNECE Statistical Division

The presentations and full programme are available on the [UNSC Site](#).

Over 80 people participated in the seminar with interesting presentations and questions. The objective of the seminar was to discuss the way the NSOs (National Statistical Offices) and NSS (National Statistical Systems) work in a rapidly changing and competitive data landscape. They have to adapt to the new data needs such as those required by the monitoring of the SDGs. Using new data sources such as administrative data and Big Data requires changes in their internal processes, as well as building partnerships with other data communities. Despite growing data needs, NSOs leaderships are facing limited resources. Other data communities

outside official statistics may represent competitive forces, but also offer important opportunities to help to respond to these challenges.

To evolve within the above-mentioned scenario, we must ask whether the current NSO business models are still relevant or they should be changed. In the last few years, several solutions have been developed and tested in different national and international projects.

This session provided an opportunity to share the lessons learned so far and to discuss the way ahead.

Bert Kroese, Deputy Director General of Statistics Netherlands (CBS) made a very compelling presentation about recent CBS initiatives such as the CBS newsroom. The CBS is now at the core of providing the Dutch media and society with news updates also through social media. The Data Lake approach makes it possible to combine and analyse data quickly. CBS is initiating cooperation of an unprecedented scale in the field of Big Data. CBS involves national and international parties from government, the business world, science and education, all working together in the area of Big Data technology and methodology for the production of official statistics. Other initiatives are the Centre for Policy Related Statistics that offers tailor made production and analysis for departments and other users (paid service), Open Data, and Urban Data Centres. These innovations shape the new business environment for CBS.

Genovefa Ružič, Director General, SURS, Slovenia, presented the experiences within Statistics Slovenia in using secondary data sources. Apart from a long tradition in the use of administrative data, SURS is active in using big data. Staff are actively participating in several international projects, and at the national level there is a close cooperation with the Information Officer and universities. Trust among partners, data security, standardization of process, competencies and motivation of staff and international cooperation are necessary conditions to meet the new demands and incorporate innovations. She emphasised that adaptation of NSO business models should be a continuous process.

Julio A. Santaella, President of INEGI Mexico, sketched the challenges at the national and international level and explained the special conditions in Mexico where official statistics are joined with geography in the National System of Statistical and Geographical Information, composed of government departments, organised through four national Information sub-systems and coordinated by INEGI. It is INEGI's role to generate, coordinate and disseminate both statistical and geographical information. The Generic Statistical Business Model has enabled INEGI to respond to the new national and international demands and to prepare Mexico to meet the SDG requirements. While the NSO and NSS institutional setting is important he pointed out the importance of international co-operation e.g. Global Spatial Framework.

Albina Chuwa, Director General, National Bureau of Statistics, Tanzania, could not attend the event. Lidia Bratanova summarized her presentation. Ms. Chuwa explained the substantial use of secondary data for the compilation of National Accounts and for social and environmental statistics in Tanzania. The Electronic Population Register and CAPI Techniques have proven to be indispensable tools. The adaption of the statistical system requires good and strong leadership and adaption to new data sources and production methods. Non-official data sources are to be used and new technologies and partnership to be embraced.

The presentations by the invited speakers were followed by interesting comments and questions from the floor.

One issue raised was whether providing more analytical news facts will not be seen as too much interfering with policy and planning.

Confidentiality issues in administrative data sharing and the role of technologies were addressed.

With regard to the used business models, there was a question about the shift from the vertical to horizontal production lines. How does globalisation influence our work and outputs? Are there common denominators for changing the current business models? Are there new ethical issues? How to keep staff motivated with so many changes in the office and how to describe the needed skills? Middle management was mentioned as an important part of leadership.

Bert Kroese emphasized that whatever data sources are being used, the results disseminated by the statistical office should be objective and of good quality. With regard to business models, he commented that one should not be afraid to experiment and learn from that. For NSOs, investing in modern ways of communication and dissemination is a core issue in order to stay relevant. Working with universities and others will help to develop new methodologies.

There is of course discussion about data analysis. Data virtualization may be a solution to overcome privacy issues. For example, hospitals cannot exchange all individual data with NSOs but by using data visualization tools more possibilities arise. Telecompanies do not always want to share their data but CBS can send data queries to get specific data results.

Julio Alfonso replied that sometimes things happen at the right time. In Mexico, democracy has matured and institutions have developed. That helped to ensure INEGI's administrative authority and independence. However, developing the skills of the workforce remains a challenge.

Genovefa Ružić addressed the issue of cooperation with registration authorities where SURS provides analysis and helps them to present their data more regularly. SURS is, among other user groups, especially targeting young people by organising special events and constantly innovating its dissemination. Young people use lots of data from all sources. It is remarkable that they still trust official data; this is good but innovation remains necessary. Middle management needs more attention and support, as it is crucial for the motivation of the workforce.

Bert Kroese mentioned that one has to look where the boundaries are for what can be done in terms of analysis and publication. It also remains important to emphasise that the NSO publishes statistics and not individual data.

Lidia Bratanova summarised the key points from presentations and discussion.

Official Statistics are being challenged nationally and internationally and we should all strive for change. Adaptation and innovations of NSO business models are necessary in order to remain relevant. This process has to be organised as a continuous evolution of strategic, legal, and operational framework. Trust is crucial for the perception that statistics are relevant. Coordination at international level is important. Social media is absolutely a challenge; the new generation is not very fond of reading statistical yearbooks. Partnerships are crucial and the keywords are: Collaboration, Coordination, Cooperation, and Standardisation. She concluded by asking a question on how we can best communicate good practices and innovations in NSO business models among the statistical community.

Irena Križman thanked the presenters and participants for their extremely valuable input. She suggested that the planned update of the UN Handbook on Statistical Organisations could be a place to share good practices and innovations of NSO business models.

Irena Križman closed the event by inviting participants to join the ISI World Statistics Congress, which will be held from 16-20 July 2017 in Marrakech, Morocco. There will be a special meeting with NSOs to continue our discussions.

Ada van Krimpen

Irena Križman

Pedro Silva

4 April 2017.