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Session II: Changes in Communication

Changes in Communication
(Experience of National Statistics Office of Georgia)

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Introduction

Statisticians need to make all users to use statistical output in the correct way. Statistics can tell people something about the world they live in. However everyone is not adept at understanding statistics by themselves. Therefore, statisticians also need to think about simplification of their product. Statistical information should be easy to understand and interpret.

From the very beginning, in February 2010, when Geostat was formed as an independent NSO, a new website was launched and the new formats of information dissemination (data in PDF format together with corresponding excel files) were created. Now website contains the detailed description of all the main methodologies used (prices, employment, subsistence minimum, national accounts, external statistics), written clearly and simply, using the language and style that an ordinary citizen can understand.

Request from data users and volume of statistical information have increased dramatically during recent years. Different data users prefer different channels of receiving enormous volumes of data and statisticians need to adapt their dissemination systems to user's needs. Online web-browsers, social media, mobile phones are the most preferable ways to communicate with users and obviously, it cause changes in communication.

This paper will focus on the following issues:

1. Unified statistical database. Online questionnaires database is used to collect primary survey data respondents. Survey questionnaire data is filled out by respondents online or by internal interviewers (personal statistician) and after passing all procedures is available within the main part of database. The external government sources database is used to collect primary data from several government institutions. Data is filled out by appropriate establishment and is available after passing all necessary procedures.
2. Data dissemination - online presentation database which is used to disseminate statistical data and contains parts for data dissemination to PC-Axis, Nada, cell phone dissemination application and Geostat business portal.
3. User Engagement - Geostat has a permanent consultation with users by means of joint workshops, web-forum, hotline phone, and the social media.

Unified Statistical Database

In 2010, Geostat prepared and approved IT Development Strategy. The strategy covered the both of main statistical works: data collection and data dissemination. Data collection is first and main part of Unified Statistical Database, and is directly responsible to correct primary data collection.

Online questionnaires database. Geostat has prepared online statistical data collection tool, which contains online database for survey result storage, survey publishing module; primary data control module and synchronization procedures. Through this engine tool it is possible to

prepare online questionnaires - the collection of statistical survey data from external users easily. There is also opportunity to enter the data by Geostat's internal data collectors from paper questionnaires.

In addition, all surveys are attached by supervisors, personal statisticians and coordinators to minimize the risk of filling the data with mistakes or errors. The software returns a particular survey questionnaire to respondent in case of incorrect data is entered. At the same time, Geostat staff can correct data by phone interview. In business surveys, all respondents have a personal statistician at Geostat data collection unit, who helps respondents to fill the questionnaires. Besides, online questionnaires system gives possibilities to respondents to get diverse statistical information free of charge. When companies open their profiles at Geostat web, they can regularly see some updates of statistical data about the sector there are involved.

The online questionnaires were piloted with respondent business companies and the work was finalized according to their recommendations or advices. The online surveys launched in October 2012, when business statistics survey, external economic relations survey and agricultural sampling survey moved to online questionnaires. Response rate in business oriented surveys was 40%, which seems to be a successful result since the legislation in Georgia does not oblige the companies even to fill questionnaires.

There is difference in data collection between business surveys and agricultural surveys. When business companies are opening their profiles, filling, posting and storing questionnaires, in agricultural survey the local supervisors are responsible to fill the online questionnaires after their will collect paper questionnaires from enumerators. All local supervisors are equipped by laptop computers and internet.

External government sources database. The second way to receive administrative source information is to receive the data from external government sources. In this case system has an ability to collect the data from the various sources: public registry, revenue service, city hall and others. Data comes automatically into unified database after validation, primary preparation and passing all necessary data processing procedures. All links with different data sources are defined by memorandums of cooperation. The system is in the process of introduction to different data producers.

At the same time, every survey passes through primary data control and logical control module, as well as through the automated primary data validation and logical control module. Primary data validation module is flexible system, which allows checking of the data filled by respondents and has the ability to return the invalid or incorrectly filled data to the primary data producer or respondents.

Data Dissemination

Statistical data provided by Geostat have different formats and data itself is provided by different ways. The first is PDF format press releases. Press releases are released on Geostat website at the exact time of 11 a.m. on a due date, in line with the advanced release calendar. Press-releases are accompanied by excel format tables and visual graphs or charts together with excel tables.

Statistical database dissemination via **PC-AXIS** (Developed by Sweden Statistics) was implemented in November 2012. PC-Axis is a program developed by Statistics Sweden and is suitable for the handling of statistical information. It provides diverse possibilities for editing, selecting variables, rotating, sorting, exporting etc. The software is for customers who need to handle multidimensional tables efficiently or retrieve tables that are too large for the web browser to deal with. Data users can obtain statistical information in desired formats – tables, graphs, charts, pies, excel files as well as print relevant information directly from the program.

PC Axis installation was supported by Statistics Sweden within the cooperation project. Geostat became the first institution in Georgia, who has a PC-Axis license.

Geostat prepared and launched special **data dissemination application for android type cell phones**. Users can download and install application from Geostat official website. The application allows user to view most updated official statistics provided by Geostat online. System makes it available to review statistical data into past years together with new updated information. By using this application, it is possible to select data by category, sub-category and by period. Android cell phone application disseminates: external trade, foreign direct investments, CPI and PPI, demography, agriculture Statistics, business statistics, national accounts. Through application, users can also receive the recent Geostat news. There was more than 1500 downloads during first two months, since application was launched.

With support PARIS21 Geostat is working on National Data Achieve (**NADA**) - **microdata dissemination system**. NADA is web-based software for cataloging and disseminating microdata of census or other surveys. NADA provides a powerful instrument that facilitates the process of releasing study metadata and microdata to the users. NADA allows end permits to search and review metadata information together with survey data and will be used to disseminate microdata catalogs after primary statistical data anonymous.

NADA allows users for:

- Increased quality and diversity of research,
- Improved reliability and relevance of data,
- Reduced duplication of data collection activities,
- Improved visibility of the institution as their data becomes more frequently used and is more readily accessible,
- Increased public trust towards the institution,
- Improved publishing and dissemination efficiency of the Geostat.

Geostat is also developing a **Business Portal, which** makes it possible to create statistical information reports in different ways. Business Portal allows users to search any published statistical data using keywords or via predefined category/research list, group selected data by different criteria, apply user selections and receive on screen charts or tables of statistical data. It also allows users to group selected data by different criteria.

In general, much work has been done in organizing IT both inside the office and for dissemination. The work is often organized as projects with interdivisional working groups. This ensures the participation of subject matter expert as well as IT expert, which is vital for developing solutions that will work from both technical and professional side.

Besides, Geostat has a good legal basis for dissemination and has implemented best practice concerning equal access to all users and an advance release calendar.

User Engagement

Data users request to measure everything, but resources of statisticians are limited. Statisticians always drop a line between what is measurable and what is not measurable. There number of users of official statistics in Georgia is rapidly growing. For example, number of visitors to the Geostat website increased by 40% in 2011 in comparison with 2010 and by ?% in 2012 in comparison with 2011.

There are two sides in the communication process of official statistics – statisticians and respondents. Respondents at the same time could be the users of statistical information. Official statistics is a combination of information collected from different sources – respondents and administrative sources. In order to produce reliable statistics, it is urgently required to collect reliable information from sources. Both sides – statisticians as well as respondents are responsible for the quality of statistical information.

User engagement improves trust towards NSO and its official statistics. In this particular area an active dialogue with all data users and communication with data providers is the way which improves and simplifies data exchange links.

The one important tool of user engagement is a web forum at Geostat website where any visitor can express his/her opinion ask questions or request statistical data. At the same time, social media such as facebook is actively used to disseminate statistics and communicate with users.

Besides, some of the databases (Integrated Household Survey, CPI indices) were uploaded to the Geostat's website. In order to evaluate Geostat's efficiency in serving different data users, quarterly reporting system was introduced which contains the number of issued publications, press releases, statistical information upon request as well as the number of visitors to the Geostat website. In order to improve service and monitoring, hot line phone number was provided on the website.

Regular surveys are carried out to evaluate the public awareness of Geostat. Cooperation started with different business associations, where the subject-oriented working meetings were initiated. The same cooperation started in the working format with various NGOs and universities.

Meanwhile, the capital city-Tbilisi Regional Office was transformed into the Tbilisi Statistical Bureau with new standards and rules of communication and relations with respondents and data users. Guidelines for effective communication was adopted, which fosters the improvement of field operations.

Personal statisticians are serving respondents in business statistics and foreign economic relations survey. They provide guidelines to fill the questionnaires as well as assisting them to get desired statistical information.