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Topic (i): Planning and management of statistical data editing

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF STATISTICAL PUBLICATIONS

Contributed Paper

Submitted by the State Statistical Committee, Azerbaijan¹

1. Official statistics in a modern society are a most important tool of general government, serving to provide information on socio-economic processes for regular monitoring of the development of the country's economy.
2. The basic task of the State Statistical Committee (Goskomstat) of the Azerbaijan Republic is to disseminate official statistics on the economic and social situation in the country.
3. The Committee has earned a reputation for supplying objective, up-to-date and reliable official statistical information.
4. The independence of Goskomstat is protected by the Statistics Act, which states that "the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan shall provide statistical information about the economic and social development of the Republic on the basis of a uniform methodology. The State Statistical Committee of the Azerbaijan Republic, while part of the system of central executive bodies, is an independent central economic institution having responsibility for statistics and accounting. The Government and other State bodies at all levels shall not interfere with the work of the State Statistical Committee and its regional offices".
5. Goskomstat is responsible for carrying out reforms in statistics. The first statistical programme was drawn up for the period 1993-1997. It was followed by a second long-term multi-annual integrated programme for the development of statistics entitled "State programme on the reform of the State statistical system of the Azerbaijan Republic for 1998-2002". This programme was drafted on the basis of suggestions by the heads of all structural subdivisions and discussed by them jointly with the Goskomstat senior management. The programme was later agreed with 25 other State and scientific institutions and endorsed by the Cabinet of Ministers. The President of the Azerbaijan Republic approved the programme on 20 August 1998, and it has been in the course of implementation since then.
6. The programme covers all Goskomstat statistical activities over the five-year period. This programme already incorporates many elements of the so-called MEPS, which will require further refinement when the next-long-term programme is drawn up.

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7. The five-year State programme serves as the basis for the drafting and approval each year by the Board of Directors of an annual plan of activities to achieve the priority goals set for the coming period. Resources are allocated each year from the State budget to finance the activities planned, but the funds provided are unfortunately insufficient.
8. The long-term and annual programmes are drawn up to address the problems and weaknesses of the existing statistical system, and also with a view to meeting users' requirements and international standards. Progress reports on the implementation of the annual programme are made regularly to the Goskomstat Board of Directors.
9. Work is now under way to prepare a new five-year State programme (covering the period 2003-2007) for the development of statistics, and this will be submitted to the President for approval in 2002. In the drafting of the programme Goskomstat is endeavouring to apply MEPS approaches and methods for planning. Under the national Constitution, the State five-year programme has to be approved by the President of the Republic, and an annual statistical work plan (or regulations), after being agreed with the Cabinet of Ministers, is approved by Goskomstat. A key role in the allocation of funds for the programme is played by the Ministry of Finance.
10. Appended to the annual programme is a list of the surveys to be conducted over the year and financed from the respective year's budget. Questionnaires (statistical report forms) for the surveys are drafted by the relevant subdivisions of Goskomstat together with the methodology section, taking into consideration, the recommendations of the national accounts department. In other cases, draft forms are agreed with the data providers and main users (Government institutions, banks, etc.). The questionnaire forms for surveys are sometimes tested at selected enterprises. The number of statistical report forms is being decreased from year to year, but many one-time surveys are still conducted. Much of the information collected, however, is out of date.
11. In 1997 Goskomstat set up a Board on methodology. In addition to Goskomstat representatives, it includes specialists from the Ministry of Economic Development and its Centre for Economic Reform, the Economics Institute of the Academy of Sciences, and the Ministry of Agriculture. The Board defines official statistical policy, designs, oversees and organizes long-term activities and monitors implementation of the statistical work programme. It also coordinates the work of carrying out all official statistical tasks of the Azerbaijan Republic covered by the statistical work programme. In addition, the Board holds consultations on methodology and planning in the statistical system.
12. Statistical information is disseminated under the Azerbaijan Republic Statistics Act in three ways:
 - In printed (hard-copy) form;
 - On diskettes;
 - Via the Internet.
13. Extensive advertising is virtually the only way of drawing attention to statistical publications. Goskomstat's books are advertised on national television in the "World of Books" programme. In addition, the user is sent a copy and, if he or she is interested in obtaining more copies, the cost of the book is charged to the Goskomstat account. Press releases are prepared under the plan relating to economic projects and these appear on the pages of the mass media.
14. As a result of the assistance provided since 1998 under the TACIS programme for the publication and dissemination of statistical data, considerable progress has been made in this respect. The schedule of publications has been expanded and improvements made to the structure, content and range of publications. Relations with the users of the statistical information have become more intensive. The statistical yearbook has appeared in Azeri and English since 1994. The 2000 and 2001 statistical yearbooks and the statistical compendiums "Independent Azerbaijan 10", "Azerbaijan in the Twentieth Century" and "Regions of

Azerbaijan” were issued on CD-ROMs, also in the two languages, and have won high praise for their quality. Through these publications, statistical data has been disseminated to a great variety of users. A large amount of work has been carried out to prepare a statistical compendium covering three South Caucasian countries for the year 2000. It will be issued in two languages (Russian and English), and CD-ROMs are also planned.

15. Each sectoral department, moreover, has since 1998 been publishing statistical compendiums in Azeri and English for its own respective area: national accounts, industry, construction, agriculture, transport and communications, prices, education and culture, health care, environment, labour, wholesale and retail trade, foreign trade, etc.

16. Goskomstat concentrates essentially on providing information for its own traditional users, i.e. State administrative bodies and especially the Government. Other users, including journalists, also turn to Goskomstat for information and this is made available periodically as needed in the course of the year. To improve services to users, Goskomstat has set up a modern library and issued a catalogue of statistical publications. At the time of issue of the yearbook, an ad hoc survey was conducted to find out whether users of the information were satisfied, but very few responses have so far been received. The Statistical Committee’s Internet address is: <http://www.statcom.baku-az.com>. The author’s e-mail address is: mary@azstat.org.

17. Goskomstat publishes the monthly reports “Economic and social situation in the country” in Azeri, and quarterly statistical bulletins in Azeri and English.

18. A user database was set up in August 2000. This mainly includes ministries, State institutions, research institutes, international organizations, embassies of foreign States, major firms and joint ventures, the mass media and private individuals. The Statistics Act allows Goskomstat to sell statistical information and make a profit from this. Some publications and prepared materials have been on sale since 2001, but thus far only in limited quantities.

19. Data dissemination policy needs to be improved and a policy on marketing statistical information still has to be drawn up.

20. Goskomstat publishes detailed information on the economic and social situation in the country each month in the leading national newspapers. Press releases are also issued regularly. Press conferences are held as and when necessary. In connection with the tenth anniversary of the Republic’s sovereignty, for example, a scientific and practical conference was held jointly with representatives of the National Academy of Sciences and the press. The Statistical Committee’s Chairman sometimes invites individual journalists for bilateral discussions on statistical data.

21. Goskomstat representatives address the public on radio and television to explain changes taking place in the field of statistics.

22. All data exciting keen interest (for example, figures on GDP, the price index and the level of unemployment) is included in monthly reports. The information is made available as scheduled. All categories of users receive press releases at the same time, and no one institution is given preference over the others. Publication dates are set for press releases and these are made known to the public.

23. Goskomstat senior management is endeavouring to act on the various requests made for statistical information in the country. Goskomstat regularly receives requests for data from State administrative bodies and also from private individuals. Very many requests arrive, moreover, by electronic mail from both local and foreign users (students, researchers, administrators, etc.).

24. However, there is for the time being no systematic follow-up concerning the demand for statistical information.

25. In providing information to the public Goskomstat adheres to the following principles:

Reliability

- The information communicated must be correct;
- The nature of the information (comprehensiveness, comparability) and its authoritativeness (sources from which the information is obtained) must be made apparent to the public;

Timeliness

- Information has to be supplied as soon as possible;
- At the time of publication particular attention must be devoted to the most pressing current affairs in society;

Democraticness

- Every citizen of Azerbaijan must have access to statistics giving basic information on the social situation, and the statistical data has to be presented in a readily comprehensible form not requiring knowledge of special terminology.

26. As a result of the development of information technology, information can be disseminated much more quickly on electronic data carriers than on traditional ones. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, modern computer equipment and technologies have become much cheaper and more widely available. Nowadays, even in the most backward countries, many people have modern personal computers, and this enables them, using electronic data carriers, to copy and use the necessary information. Secondly, the development of modern communications channels and technologies have “shrunk” the world (distances are shorter) and this affords wider opportunities for producing, increasing the supply of and disseminating information. Thirdly, the information is far cheaper, and may also be of better quality. Fourthly, it is becoming accessible to an ever-wider range of users, at no additional cost, and may generate more income.

27. Modern electronic publications may be carried on:

- diskettes;
- laser disks;
- magnetic disks.

The information may be provided by:

- conventional means of communication;
- electronic mail;
- Internet.

Publications may take the form of:

- publication files;
- web pages;
- electronic books.

28. The trend today is towards ever greater use of electronic publications and eventually, perhaps even in the not too distant future, publications will be in electronic form only.

29. For the production of electronic publications use is made of a great variety of software - ranging from the usual text editors to very powerful editors and table processors, programmes for opening electronic books, miscellaneous publishing programmes and graphic editors, as well as different kinds of programmes for constructing web pages. With the development of compact-disc and Internet technologies, publishing has also moved over to electronic

publications, the issue of multimedia products on CD-ROMs and the creation of web servers. This has led to the appearance of a large number of electronic publications supported by Internet technologies, including html, Java and vml.

30. Web technologies are now developing very rapidly. Many organizations, enterprises and firms are supplying their own information and advertising on web pages.

31. Goskomstat is using some of the above-mentioned software for its publications. The many problems facing the Committee in this respect include the acquisition of appropriate software products and the training of qualified staff.

32. Goskomstat's web page has already been in existence for several years. Information on the site is updated, in the best case, once a year. The web page was until this year on the server of outside providers, but Goskomstat now has its own server. The web page carries information from the statistical yearbook issued by the State Committee. This largely consists of statistical tables taken from the compendium.

33. Goskomstat has a great deal to do here to reach the stage where it can provide modern interactively changing pages, and will have to reorganize the existing page and create new pages suitable for its publications. This means setting up databases and building interfaces to access information sites or transfer information to the web page, as well as sending questionnaires from the web pages to gather and update information.

34. One means of disseminating statistical information is through the mass media. Journalists from the central media are frequent guests at Goskomstat. During their visits they are briefed on Goskomstat's activities and services, informed about some of its statistical materials, and presented with new information. Each month, therefore, the mass media can print a review of the economic and social situation in the country, and carry press releases and other information of interest.

35. Work is being continued as part of international cooperation for the dissemination of statistical data with the statistical services of the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Monetary Fund, the International Labour Organization, Black Sea Economic Cooperation pact countries, UNESCO, UNICEF and others.
