**Organisational barriers to international collaboration**

**Introduction**

The Modernisation Committee on Organisational Framework and Evaluation created a Task Team to work on the problems of organisational barriers to international collaboration in April 2016.

The goal of this Task Team is to produce a list of the most important barriers to international collaboration and present some examples of the best practices from the countries to overcome the barriers. In this context international collaboration is defined broadly. It may be formalised or voluntary, bilateral or multilateral, based on a formal or informal agreement, or development-technical assistance collaboration.

This is the first output of this group which will be presented at the Workshop on the Modernisation of Official Statistics (Geneva, 22-23 November). The initial draft was shared with members of all of the HLG-MOS modernisation committees for input and best practices.

**The process**

During the brainstorming session the Task Team identified the list of possible barriers to international collaboration:

1. Legal
2. Stakeholder engagement
3. Selection of people involved in the international collaboration
4. Mandate (vision)
5. Lack of coordination inside statistical offices
6. Lack of coordination between organisations
7. Internal versus external barriers
8. Internal communication
9. Human and financial resources
10. Burden on lead organisation
11. External communication
12. Work being done on the corner of the desk

You can see more detailed description of each barrier here:

<http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/MCOOFE/Old+table+-+List+of+all+bariers+to+international+cooperation+-+results+of+the+vote>

After initial review of the list of barriers, it was decided that it is too many barriers to deal with at the moment, and it was suggested to shorten the list to 4-5 barriers.

The revised list of barriers combined all barriers listed above into 5 groups:

1. Lack of coordination inside statistical offices (also includes: internal communication, burden on lead organisation, internal vs external barriers)
2. Human and financial resources (also includes: Selection of people involved in the international collaboration, Work being done 'on the corner of the desk')
3. Stakeholder engagement (also includes: Mandate (vision))
4. Lack of coordination between organisations (also includes: External communication)
5. Legal

It was decided that at the moment the group will not work on the legal barriers, but instead will focus on the other 4 barriers.

**Barriers selected for work**

For each barrier it was suggested to identify issues/problems that should be looked into and to propose possible solutions.

1. **Lack of coordination inside statistical offices**

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| N | Issues | Description | Solutions/Good practices |
| 1 | How to coordinate? | Need for an organisational model (formal or ad-hoc) to coordinate many different international activities.  Mechanisms for sharing/collaborating are not horizontal within organizations. | Having an International collaboration division as a permanent organizational unit.  Assigning the responsibility for international collaboration to a key senior official (ex. Assistant Chief Statistician). |
| 2 | Inefficient internal communication | Inside organisations many activities are not known. | Having a centralized structure and one person responsible to gather summary information on activities on a regular basis that is presented to senior management and posted on a website for a wider audience.  Maintaining a list of contact persons. For efficient internal communication - especially in large offices - it is essential to know who does what (portfolio responsibilities, attending international expert groups, etc.) and keep the list of contact persons up-to-date.  Propose to the senior management to create an office-wide structure by appointing international coordinators/focal points in each statistical division/department. They could be responsible for keeping an overview on who does what in their division/department.  Having regular monthly meeting with all co-ordinators in order to share information and status, prepare briefing notes, etc. may increase communication (or may not be necessary if focal points are very active.) |
| 3 | Burden on lead organisation | Lead NSOs are often restrained by the significant amount of administrative, legal, HR and logistical issues associated with international collaboration efforts. | Setting expectations and having a clear shared vision from the beginning, including an understanding of the constraints of each organisation (budget, people involved, etc.).  Good co-ordination between international organisations and NSOs.  Having tools and a good space for sharing information so that all can collaborate efficiently.  For the ESS Net projects, a modernisation workshop was led by Eurostat with all project leaders in order to share good practices, procedures, give advice on administrative work, and guide on how to apply for grants. |

1. **Human and financial resources**

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| N | Issues | Description | Solutions/Good practices |
| 1 | Clear guidelines within organisations on support for international collaboration | In order to secure funding, allocate staff time and prioritize international collaboration activities against internal activities, it is important that guidelines are clear and supported by senior management. | Development of an international strategy with a description of tasks, roles and responsibilities to be adopted by the senior management.  Adequate internal communication of the international strategy. Senior management should communicate the guidelines of participation in international fora according to their priority subjects and budgets. |
| 2 | Reconciling the international agenda with national activities | Given the already high workload and budgetary pressures, the relative importance and priority of international activities compared to national activities must be clear within the organisation. | Documentation of the vision and strategy for international collaboration and how it fits into the broader organisational vision and strategy.  The international agenda can be very extensive. Each organisation should analyze national priorities and seek to insert the international agenda in alignment with priority issues for national institutions. |
| 3 | Role and financing of drivers to stimulate the commitment of the group | People involved in international projects usually have other positions within their institution. To ensure the necessary continuity and to coordinate and stimulate the activities, it is necessary to have roles (drivers) that are financed by the project. | Drivers can: i) stimulate participation by group members, requesting contributions and by linking together the right people, ii) organize the meetings (virtual and F2F), iii) monitor compliance with the deadlines, iv) coordinate the activities of the group with other groups.  People who play this role should have time dedicated to this work in their job description. |
| 4 | Face to face meetings versus virtual calls | Virtual calls and the use of WebEx have been found to be very effective means of conducting international business, and save costs. It is however useful from time to time to have face-to-face meetings to further advance work plans, and the justification for face-to-face meetings are becoming increasingly challenged. | Having sprints (time boxed sessions with specific outputs) are very effective mechanisms to make significant progress on specific issues in a short period of time, with contribution from the right experts.  Conduct the necessary virtual meetings and limit the number of face-to-face meetings, depending on their character and importance of the topic covered. |
| 5 | Budget pressures within organisations | When budgets are being reduced for statistical programs or operations, it can be difficult to justify time or resources spent on international activities.  This can affect middle-managers in particular, and make them reluctant to participate in international collaboration efforts. | Investigating with external stakeholders/funding organisations options for funding to support international activities.  In the Netherlands the international policy was changed, and now middle managers are forced to devote a certain percentage of their work to international collaboration. In Italy they have annual planning of international collaboration, where a percentage of international activities is indicated for every directorate. |
| 6 | The same people are involved in multiple activities | This can create i ) workload issues with those participating, ii) perception of favoritism to those not asked to participate, iii) vulnerabilities given that the knowledge/experience is growing in a small number of people. | Offering opportunities widely within an organisation in order to broaden the knowledge base, and support learning and development opportunities for employees.  It is suggested that the same person should not represent an institution in more than two working groups. It is up to each NSO to decide on the adequate participation in a meeting on a case by case approach focusing on choosing an expert who will best represent the statistical office. |
| 7 | Clear financial and senior management support for international work | Without clear senior management support and financial commitments, the value and importance of international activities may be questioned. | see #1 |
| 8 | Language barrier/ Insufficient knowledge of English | Most of the discussions and documentation are in English, which is not the primary language in many contributing countries.  International collaboration requests received from national statistical institutions and/or international organisations may be rejected by the technical departments/staff due to insufficient knowledge of English. | Increasing the number of English-speaking staff working not only in the international relations departments, but also in the technical departments of NSOs by in-service training.  Encourage English-speaking organisations should make efforts to raise awareness among their employees that when communicating with international partners they should speak slowly and distinctly. |

1. **Stakeholder engagement**

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| N | Issues | Description | Solutions/Good practices |
| 1 | Lack of strategic support and buy in (including clear financial and senior management support) | Many international projects quickly fail within organisations due to lack of strategic awareness and support that comes from poor communication, and not involving senior management early enough in the project. For example over selling the benefits without given a clear picture of the long term vision and gains. See #2. | The international collaboration projects should put in place a governance structure that ensures senior management involvement.  Clear and strong messaging from senior management.  Ensure there is regular dialogue between senior managers from each participating organisation. |
| 2 | Long term vision and benefits versus short term gains | Many projects either fail or never reach full potential within an NSO due to over selling benefits that can only be seen in the medium to long term when international collaboration is involved. | Clearly present the facts from the beginning and demonstrate linkages with own organisation’s strategy. |
| 3 | Changing organisational culture | It is at times difficult to show the value of international collaboration to stakeholders at various levels within the organisation. Different perspectives on the benefits/ advantages of international collaboration in the different parts of the organisation (i.e. between methodology, IT, subject matter, operational areas) and within levels of management (i.e. senior management vs. middle management vs working level).  Employees and managers need to understand more fully 'what's in it for them'. | Clear and strong messaging from senior management.  International collaboration is a very useful investment for the organisations as the benefits allows to improve the processes in the adoption of best practices.  A best practice from Poland is offering annual training to CSO employees on International cooperation activities of the office. Both theoretical and practical issues are discussed, including how to effectively participate in international meetings. |
| 4 | More clear rules for collaboration | Rules for collaboration are not always clear or documented. | Having a clear documented framework like in the EU and the HLG Statement of Intent.  Terms of reference, mandates, deliverables, deadlines, etc. are also key.  Signing framework collaboration agreements between countries at the level of heads of governments including the sub-headings as “collaboration on statistical activities” besides the other collaboration subjects relating trade etc. |
| 5 | Lack of a clear international strategy document. Adoption and Communication of the international strategy | All managers should be committed to implement the agreed and adopted international strategy of the NSO. After adoption clear communication will ensure awareness of the strategy. | Having an international strategy document and ensure implementation (such as the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics of FAO).  Having a high level overview/diagrams with a brief synopsis on what we are seeking to achieve, what are the expected benefits.  Need to make this information clearly accessible i.e. home page of UNECE, also allow individual countries to share their success stories. |
| 6 | Different levels of maturity of NSO | Increases the differences in the available human and financial resources, the skills and experience of the staff and the available know-how, systems and infrastructures. | The exchange of staff between NSOs contribute to professional development and network creation. Although a challenge in terms of resources, language constraints and some legal barriers, a number of NSOs have put in place policies to promote exchanges.  Conducting training courses on specialized statistical areas and the provision of expertise and know-how by experts (ex. from the European Statistical System). |

1. **Lack of coordination between organisations**

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| N | Issues | Description | Solutions/Good practices |
| 1 | Multiple groups (organisations) working on similar issues | Work being done within organisations in support of their mandate might be quite applicable and useful to other organisations. Information sharing mechanisms that could highlight workplans across organizations are lacking.  Often similar organisations work on the same strategic projects (ex. big data, globalisation, exchange of microdata) and sometimes in a certain competition with each other.  In some cases results and deliverables of completed collaboration projects are not utilized, we "invent the wheel" again and again and duplicate efforts. | The planning exercise initiated by the HLG in 2015, gathering the high level investments National Statistical Organisations are making over the next few years, along with the business capabilities they are addressing is a great start.  Agree on coordination mechanisms between (international) organisations will contribute to a better division of tasks, making use of each other expertise and knowledge. Focus on collaboration instead of competition.  Appointing owner(s) to the deliverables and communicating this towards partners is important to foster further use and prevent parallel work. |
| 2 | There is not one source that compiles the plans and priorities across organisations. | It would be beneficial to compare work of the national and international groups. | A central webpage that provides links to the planning documentation already available on the internet. A second step would be to have resources review, analyze and summarize this planning documentation. |
| 3 | Technology constraints | Making sure that all organisations can use basic collaboration tools, like WebEx for example. | Collaboration via WebEx |
| 4 | Different time zones | Problem of different time zones for collaboration. | Careful scheduling of calls, taking into account different time zones. |
| 5 | Last minute calls | NSOs are sometimes informed late, and are not in a position to assign experts for the collaboration due to their full schedule. | More mature planning and providing sufficient advance warning. |