

***Report on  
ILO-PARIS21 Seminar on Capacity Building for Labour Statistics,  
Geneva, 3 December 2003***

## **Introduction**

The ILO Bureau of Statistics and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (PARIS21) jointly organised a Seminar on capacity building for labour statistics, held in Geneva on 3 December 2003, the last day of the 17<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians. The seminar was attended by about 200 participants, including representatives from ministries of labour, national statistical offices, workers' groups, employers' groups, international agencies and donors<sup>1</sup>.

## **Objectives**

The Seminar was intended to identify positive approaches to capacity building for labour statistics, recognizing (i) labour statistics systems in their own right and (ii) labour statistics as part of the wider statistical system (including their dependence upon appropriately designed population census activities, establishment surveys activities, household surveys programmes, classifications, concepts, etc).

## **Summary**

Details of the mode of operation, agenda and key persons involved are given in Annex 1. All participants welcomed the initiative of the ILO Bureau of Statistics in arranging the Seminar and involving PARIS21 as co-organiser.

The main points made during the Seminar were the following:

### Current situation:

Countries' statistical capacities may develop using differing paths and strategies, but many of the problems in the development of sustainable systems of labour statistics are common to all. Some of the problems mentioned at the Seminar were:

- (a) Labour statistical systems are often not coordinated in that concepts, definitions, classifications, etc are not standardised or coordinated within the country and hence users have problems in reconciling statistics produced from different sources and for different regions or periods;
- (b) Labour statistical systems are similarly not coordinated with the statistical systems for other topics (education, health, agricultural and other production, etc);

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<sup>1</sup> All major donors were invited through their Geneva missions, but none spoke at the Seminar on the question of funding.

- (c) The technical assistance of international agencies is not well coordinated in that separate, specialised surveys may be advocated instead of meeting the same needs by the addition of questions or modules to existing surveys;
- (d) Institutional coordination is also a problem in many countries in that the ministry of labour and the national statistical office do not work in close collaboration to discuss statistical needs and priorities, to coordinate statistical standards and output, to avoid overlaps in data collection, etc;
- (e) Consequently, users may receive conflicting signals from those statistics that are available in a particular country;
- (f) In some countries, the management and research/policy advising staff of the ministry of labour are not well skilled in the interpretation of statistics. They were often not aware of the need for quality in statistics. They may make uninformed or limited use of quantitative methods in their work, and consequently do not give high priority to the development and coordination of labour statistics, or to the allocation of resources to units involved in this work;
- (g) As a result, the agencies involved in producing labour statistics generally lack:
  - a. trained staff,
  - b. expertise in various areas (management skills, statistical skills and computing expertise),
  - c. computing hardware and software,
  - d. basic working equipment and materials (desk, telephone, pens, paper),
  - e. access to appropriate documentation and technology (including access to manuals, textbooks, training material, internet, and so on),
  - f. transport for field supervision or for speedy movement of questionnaires,
  - g. adequate working conditions for staff (rates of pay, exposure to heat and dust),
  - h. and so on.

Each of these constraints needs to be addressed in order to develop and improve the capacity for producing even a basic set of labour statistics.

- (h) As a result of these constraints, surveys are infrequent and results are not available on a timely basis;
- (i) Data dissemination is limited by resources (few copies can be printed, insufficient use of electronic media) and consequently existing statistics are not always easily available even when it is known that they exist;
- (j) Statistics are not always presented in a form that makes them easy to use and relevant to the user;
- (k) There is insufficient user awareness and user knowledge of statistics.

The participants appreciated that the ILO is providing technical guidance and advice on labour statistics, and that this advice was tailored to suit national capacities and was provided using different media (telephone, e-mail and fax) and not only by missions or consultancies. However, the Seminar noted that the resources of the ILO and its Bureau of Statistics for such activities were also limited (and even decreasing) and that the ILO was not in a position to finance major data collection activities in countries as it is not a major funding agency. Funds are needed by most countries to improve their capacity for generating, disseminating and using labour statistics.

The Seminar noted that specialised agencies like the ILO are required by their mandate to work closely with the government ministries responsible for their subject matter (for example, ILO

working with ministries of labour, WHO with ministries of health, etc). This has occasionally resulted in resources being allocated to a ministry (e.g. for projects developed within a ministry) without similar resources also being provided to the national statistical agency which nevertheless would be expected to produce the statistics that were needed to assess the situation at the start of the project and to monitor progress towards the project's objectives.

Nevertheless, participants and discussants felt that the recognition being given to quantitative measures in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the need to produce statistics that can serve as basis for the indicators used to monitor progress towards Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) might result in more resources being allocated to building the capacity for statistics in general, including labour statistics.

#### Future development:

- (a) All potential sources for labour statistics should be assessed and developed, including administrative records in countries with reasonably well developed administrative systems.
- (b) As indicated in the international standards for labour statistics, a system of labour statistics should comprise a blend of household censuses and surveys, establishment censuses and surveys and statistics compiled from administrative records.
- (c) Countries require a minimum programme of labour statistics in line with their capacities;
- (d) Each country should review its national systems of labour statistics. Such reviews should include:
  - a. an assessment of user needs;
  - b. a setting of priorities to meet as many of these needs as possible within capacities and resources that realistically can be developed and made available;
  - c. recommendations on the appropriate statistical programme to achieve these statistical outputs;
  - d. identification of the training and other inputs needed to achieve this programme.Such statistical reviews should be updated every five years. In recent years, ILO statisticians have assisted a number of countries (China, Nepal, Zimbabwe) in conducting such reviews.
- (e) Legal mandates should be established in each country to ensure that responsibilities are clearly allocated to the national statistical office, the ministry of labour and other agencies for the collection or compilation of labour statistics from various sources, preferably as part of an overall strategy for national official statistics.
- (f) International technical support should be provided on a more sustainable basis. More use should be made of national consultants who can be expected to remain available in the area (rather than international consultants who are not).
- (g) Consultants and advisers should give priority to the training of local staff and then supervise the implementation of the statistical activities, rather than do the work themselves and then leave without providing the skills to continue the work.
- (h) External technical support should balance advice with the opportunity for national self-development (allowing a country's national statistical agencies to learn from their own mistakes).

- (i) External funding agencies should not disrupt planned national statistical programmes or burden these programmes with externally promoted surveys that do not meet priority national needs;
- (j) Some international agencies give a high priority to the generation of macroeconomic statistics. There is a need to also give priority to labour statistics as these describe the situation with respect to the most important productive resource of a country;
- (k) In this connection, it was suggested that each PRSP should include a chapter on human resource utilisation, human resource development and conditions of work, and that this might encourage policy-makers' awareness of the importance of labour statistics.
- (l) There should be more "south-south" technical cooperation. Developing countries should be funded to share their skills and experience with others.
- (m) Technical assistance should develop managerial capacities as well as technical capacities at operational levels. (The USA's Bureau of Labour Statistics representative mentioned that they are available to assist in statistical training.)
- (n) There should be more investment in information technology.
- (o) There is a need to raise more funds for statistical capacity building. This would also include a need to identify the various stakeholders in technical cooperation, build the infrastructure, arrange staff training and establish a dialogue with users in order to obtain feedback on priorities and needs (see also the need for a statistical review – point (d) above).
- (p) Governments should recognize the need to retain qualified staff and capacities in the national statistical agencies;
- (q) Statistical analyses should be improved and made more relevant to user needs and priorities;
- (r) Labour statistics should be used to throw light on current political issues so that the political awareness is raised, and more use is made of labour statistics when discussing, formulating and implementing policies. This should in turn raise the political awareness of the need to improve statistical capacity;
- (s) There should be more user-producer workshops to encourage the communication between these parties and more training workshops to guide users in how to make better use of labour statistics;
- (t) Workers' and employers' groups should be included in the discussions on the development of the system of labour statistics, and every effort should be made to strengthen statistical advocacy and partnership with these institutions;
- (u) The national statistical offices should be brought in at an early stage of project development in order to ensure that statistics are produced and are available at the required time for use in project monitoring.

One discussant recommended that national poverty studies should also include an assessment of "elitist separation", such that the situation of high income groups are studied as well as low income groups.

He also recommended that each country should conduct a survey of customer satisfaction and of public confidence in statistics.

During the Seminar, a number of countries (including China, Central African Republic, Philippines and Uganda) requested ILO technical assistance in improving their capacities for

labour statistics. Any country that required ILO technical assistance was requested to contact their local ILO office or the ILO Bureau of Statistics ([stat@ilo.org](mailto:stat@ilo.org)).

## **Conclusion**

The focus of the Seminar was on strategies that should be pursued within countries and by agencies providing technical advisory services. (The matter of donor funding or self-funding was not discussed and perhaps should be the subject of a separate meeting.) It was felt that these strategies are required, no matter what the sources and scale of the available funds, because no amount of external funding can make up for inadequate policies and strategies for statistical capacity building. Furthermore, it was agreed that the development of labour statistics should be included in the overall national strategy for statistics development.

The Seminar was closed by Mr Gerry Rodgers (Director of the ILO's Policy Integration Department), Mr Young (Director of the ILO Bureau of Statistics) and Mr Simonpietri (Manager of the PARIS21 Secretariat) who thanked the authors of the papers, the discussants and the plenary for their contributions.

Geneva, December 2003

## **Annex 1 - Mode of operation and Agenda**

In advance of the Seminar, five papers had been prepared as follows:

- a) “*Development in labour statistics*”, by Mr Jaime Pérez Coronel of the National Statistical Institute (INE), Bolivia;
- b) “*Key indicators of the labour market in Mali*” by Mr Saliha Doumbia of the Observatory of Employment and Training, Mali;
- c) “*Improvement of the Labour Force Survey in Thailand*” by Mr Sue Lo-Utai and Mr Wilas of the National Statistical Office, Thailand;
- d) “*Technical cooperation by the ILO*” by the ILO Bureau of Statistics, Geneva; and
- e) “*National Statistics Development Strategies (NSDS) and labour statistics*” by the PARIS21 Secretariat, Paris.

These papers were not presented separately at the Seminar but were circulated in advance and were commented upon by a panel of discussants and by the participants at the Seminar. Mr. Ben Kiregyera served as the rapporteur.

The panel of discussants comprised:

- (a) Mr Remi Bardon, Project Manager, Asia Region, EUROSTAT, Luxembourg;
- (b) Mr Kwuku Twum-Baah, acting Government Statistician of the Ghana Statistical Service;
- (c) Ms Milva Ekonomi, General Director of the Albania Institute of Statistics;
- (d) Mr Allan Nordin, Statistics Sweden (on behalf of the International Consulting Office);
- (e) Mr Antoine Simonpietri, Manager of the PARIS21 Secretariat; and
- (f) Mr A Sylvester Young, Director of the ILO Bureau of Statistics.

The agenda for the Seminar was as follows:

9:30	Opening
9:45am - 11:00am	Comments by Panel of Discussants
11:00am - 12 noon	Plenary discussion
12 noon – 12:25pm	Final comments by ILO, PARIS21 and Mr Kiregyera
12:25pm-12:30pm	Closure