Implementation of the CARICOM RSDS More Critical: Pandemic Emphasises Need For Well-resourced CARICOM Statistical System (CSS)

The CARICOM Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics (RSDS) with its strategic visioning for the improvement of statistics to 2030 takes on added significance with the onset of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic caused by the virus (SARS-CoV-2). The Regional and National Statistical Systems in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) play a vital role in monitoring and overcoming the disease. (See https://today.caricom.org/2020/05/04/tracking-covid-19-pandemic-in-caricom/).

In the national statistical systems, the Ministries of Health are the main agencies that monitor the number of confirmed cases, with a cumulative total produced on a daily basis for most countries; along with the number of new cases, which, as the name implies, is the change in the number of confirmed cases from the previous day/period to the current day/period; and the number of deaths, cumulative and new deaths.

In addition, most countries are now monitoring the number of active cases and recoveries. For some CARICOM countries, there is also information on mode of transmission – imported, locally transmitted, community transmitted, not epidemiologically linked to any confirmed case and under investigation. There is also limited information on the number of persons tested positive by sex and by hospitalisation and by geographic area within countries.

The number of deaths, recoveries and the tests conducted as well as the proportion of the population fully and partially vaccinated contribute to the assessment of the impact of the virus and on the mitigating measures to effect control. Undoubtedly, monitoring of data such as quarterly GDP, unemployment and trade can also lead to monitoring the impact on the economies of countries.

Some countries such as Belize, Grenada and Jamaica included questions or modules in existing surveys such as on the labour force survey or in new surveys in other areas such as food insecurity to measure the impact of the COVID-19 and to gauge the response of the population relative to coping strategies. In some of these cases, countries might have resorted to the use of telephone surveys or a mixture of telephone and face-to-face interviews, which show the adaptation of countries to data collection methods, given the COVID-19.

At the regional level, the Regional Statistics Programme (RSP) of the CARICOM Secretariat, compiled and disseminated a number of bulletins providing an intra-regional picture of the COVID-19 in two (2) bulletins, “Special Topic Statistical Bulletin on COVID-19” and a Mid-Week Update.

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...Pandemic Emphasises Need For Well-resourced CSS

Figure 1: Special Topic Statistical Bulletin on COVID-19 produced by the Regional Statistics Programme (RSP)

Both the Special Topic Statistical Bulletin and Mid-Week Update provided preliminary information on the pattern of the disease of the total number of confirmed cases, new cases and deaths for each country and the total for CARICOM.

Figure 2: Sample Chart showing No. of Confirmed Cases

Figure 3: A sample of the RSP COVID-19 Dashboard

Evidently, the adaptability and capacity of the regional and national statistical systems to respond to the data needs on the pandemic provide a compelling case for the implementation of the CARICOM RSDS nationally and regionally to treat with issues such as staffing/resource constraints since in times of crises, timely, high quality statistics most underscore decision-making.
Status of Implementation of the CARICOM Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics (RSDS) in Member States and Associate Members

The implementation of the CARICOM Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics (RSDS) has been affected by the conditions that were put in place to manage and withstand the COVID-19 pandemic including lockdowns of countries which led to changes in the working arrangements including that of the Regional Statistics Programme (RSP) of the CARICOM Secretariat and the National Statistical Offices in countries. In a number of cases, advancing and following-up of activities were difficult or almost impossible. Additionally, given the uncertainty surrounding the virus, actions that might have been contemplated were not implemented. In this article, we provide an update on the work put in place to date and proposed next steps in each of the five (5) Strategic priorities, the Strategic drivers and the RSDS supporting frameworks.

1. Strategic Priority (SH) - Standards and Harmonisation

- **Code of Good Statistical Practices (CGSP)**
  - Responses were received from sixteen (16) countries during the Fourth Round of the Code of Good Statistical Practices (CGSP) that was administered during 2019/2020. Refresher training is to be undertaken for the Peer Review system that is already developed in conducting the CGSP.

- **CARICOM Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF)**
  - Pilot implementation of CARICOM Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF). Phase I commenced in 2019 with a remote meeting with countries that volunteered to pilot the CQAF including, The Bahamas, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis and Suriname. A Report with main decisions was prepared including development of a generic Work Plan for the process of implementation, which countries were expected to adapt. A CQAF Work Plan to commence the pilot was prepared and submitted by one (1) country.
  - Phase II of the CQAF has been prepared and was recently disseminated to countries.

2. Strategic Priority (GOV) - Governance

- The commencement of the review of the CARICOM Model Statistics Bill occurred based on the experiences of countries that have used it to review/revise their statistics legislations. The drafting of the recommended changes is being undertaken by the Office of the General Counsel of the CARICOM Secretariat.
  - At least two (2) requests for National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) or work related to NSDS have been received from Member States/Associate Members and contact made with the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) for support.
  - The concept of the Centre of Excellence (CoE) has been developed. Questionnaires for Assessment in specific areas have been finalized for National Accounts, Prices, Sampling and Merchandise Trade in 2021. Work is now in progress on the purchase of equipment to support the process of countries becoming CoEs, with funding under the 11th EDF.
  - 2020 Regional Census Strategy is currently being implemented. Support is being provided to countries on an ”as needed” basis.
  - The concept of the Caribbean Institute for Statistical Training and Research (CISTAR) has been reactivated. Piloting of the e-CISTAR has commenced. The platform has been launched. Content development of the e-CISTAR is to continue under the 11th EDF Project.
  - Formal/informal relationships exist with some IDPs/universities including their regular presence at SCCS. A pilot activity with the University of Technology, Jamaica was completed and it included the migration of digitised training products to the e-CISTAR platform. This activity was funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

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3. Strategic Priority (ISS) - Integrated Statistical Systems

- The Generic Statistical Business Process Management (GSBPM) framework is a means to describe statistics production in a general and process-oriented way. First developed in 2008 by the Joint UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)/Eurostat/Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Group on Statistical Metadata, it is based on the business process model used by Statistics New Zealand. It has been widely adopted by the global official statistics community and has been applied to the 2020 Round of Census under a project funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). More widespread application is proposed across the entire CSS, with funding under the 11th EDF.

Strategic Priority (ISS) - Integrated Statistical Systems (Cont’d)

- Work to advance the adoption and implementation of new and existing methodological frameworks and data sources continues. Training was executed on measurement of Unpaid care and domestic Work under Government of Italy support through the Italian National Statistical Institute (Istat). Additionally, work was done to develop a pilot of an Integrated Statistical System of Administrative Registers (ISSAR) and there was introductory training conducted for countries in small groups.
- Work was also advanced under the system of Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX), with the conduct of training and the establishment of a task force, which was led by Istat as part of the Government of Italy support.
- Work was undertaken on the development of GIS-enabled data hubs, however the RSP no longer has free access to the software; for.
- The CARICOM Central repository consultancy has been launched which is supported by the 11th EDF.

4. Strategic Priority (INV) - Innovation

- Initial discussions at the AGS level commenced on investment in Cloud Services in the CARICOM Statistical System (CSS).
- The annual Regional Statistical Research Seminar is in place to encourage innovations in statistical methodologies. This is held back-to-back with the SCCS Meetings.
- A collaboration between the UK Office of National Statistics and the Project for the Regional Advancement of Statistics in the Caribbean (PRASC) led to pilot training in data science in the region. With the support of the IDB, a course on data analytics was included in the training offered by the University of Technology (UTECH), Jamaica as well as the pilot digitisation of training products for the e-CISTAR.

5. Strategic Priority (AC) - Advocacy and Communication

- Caribbean Statistics Day Commemoration instituted - the Thirteenth Observance of Caribbean Statistics Day included a Message from the Prime Minister of Grenada in his role as having the responsibility for Science and Technology in the CARICOM Quasi Cabinet and a Message from the Secretary-General of CARICOM;
- The Regional Statistics Programme hosted a virtual region-wide launch for the 2020 Round of Population and Housing Census in the Caribbean and more recently a regional radio simulcast;
- In terms of dissemination frameworks and platforms, National Statistics Offices (NSOs) have reported on new or revamped websites. Work continues on revamping of the Regional Statistics Programme (RSP) website.

Strategic Drivers

1. Information and Communication Technology

- The e-CISTAR has been launched and comprises an online learning platform, a knowledge base and a research facility. The Census e-Portal was also upgraded under a project funded by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and is being migrated to another server.
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2. **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development/ Small Island Developing States SIDS Accelerated Modalities for Action (Samoa) Pathway**

- Work is in progress on the production of Core SDG Indicators in the CCS data holdings as part of an inventory being undertaken on Social/Gender Statistics.
- Integrating of the SDG Environment Indicators in the forthcoming round of data collection is also in progress.

3. **Sustainable Capacity Building**

4. **Gender Mainstreaming**

- Collaborative work has commenced between UNWOMEN/ CARICOM, on a project targeting violence against women and girls (VAWG).
- Collaboration with the Government of Italy - Training in Gender Statistics – Issues surrounding Time Use data.
New Reporting Format for Monitoring Statistics Production and Dissemination in the Region to be guided by the CARICOM RSDS Framework

Implementation of the CARICOM RSDS at the Country Level

At the Forty-Fourth Meeting of the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians (SCCS) which was held in Kingston, Jamaica in October 2019, the five (5) Strategic Priorities and Drivers of the CARICOM Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics (RSDS) were reviewed. It was noted that many CARICOM countries including Observer countries were implementing various aspects of the RSDS at the national level. Countries were therefore encouraged to share their experiences relative to the work being done on the CARICOM RSDS.

As the Region commences formal implementation of the RSDS, it was recommended that a new format for reporting on work done nationally and regionally at the SCCS, be prepared by the Secretariat in line with the Strategic Priorities and Drivers of the CARICOM RSDS.

Given that harmonised statistical information is an essential ingredient for planning, monitoring and evaluating the development of regional integration, it is necessary that CARICOM countries produce statistics that can be aggregated at the regional level for analysis and reporting. However, the statistical programmes at the country level are at different levels of development. The CARICOM Secretariat, in collaboration with the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians (SCCS), developed the Regional Statistical Work Programme (RSWP) which was approved by the Community Council of Ministers in January 2005.

Under the RSWP which served as the reporting format since 2005, countries were able to report annually on the work undertaken in the five (5) domains, namely:

1. Demographic and Social Statistics;
2. Economic Statistics;
3. Environment and Multi-Domain Statistics;
4. Methodology of Data Collection, Processing, Dissemination and Analysis; and

The Proposed New Reporting Format

Currently countries have a standardised template to report on at the SCCS Meetings. The new reporting format under the CARICOM RSDS will allow countries to report on the five (5) Strategic Priorities of the CARICOM RSDS, within the framework of the existing template. The Strategic Priorities are:

1. Standards and Harmonisation;
2. Governance;
3. Integrated Statistical Systems;
4. Innovation; and
5. Advocacy and Communication

In the newly adopted RSDS reporting format, countries would be required to report on the work under each of the domains of the RSWP as well as on the Strategic Priorities/Drivers of the CARICOM RSDS in addition to the core areas of the RSWP.

The new format will also allow for countries to report on work undertaken that incorporates the use of the Strategic Drivers/Enablers of the CARICOM RSDS – IT Infrastructure; the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; Sustainable Capacity Building, and Gender Mainstreaming.

The format will therefore be a cross between the RSWP and the RSDS Frameworks.
Status of Key Supporting Frameworks of the CARICOM RSDS

Along with approving the implementation of the CARICOM RSDS in July 2018, the CARICOM Heads of Government also approved key actions for the development of the supporting frameworks of the RSDS. Below is a status of the four (4) frameworks approved by Heads of Government.

1. Implementation Plan with Costing

This framework was completed in 2019 to inform the development of the Resource Mobilisation Strategy (RMS).

2. Resource Mobilisation Strategy (RMS)

The RMS was completed in 2020 and was endorsed by the Standing Committee of Caribbean Statisticians (SCCS) at their Forty-fifth Meeting (November 2020). Since its endorsement, the RMS was submitted to the Partnerships and Projects Support Department (PPSD) of the CARICOM Secretariat in 2021. Work is to continue with partners for the implementation of the Strategy.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework with Compliance Scorecard

Work is in-progress on the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and the Compliance Scorecard. A Draft template was developed and reviewed by the CARICOM Advisory Group on Statistics (AGS). A small group headed by St. Vincent and the Grenadines was established to develop the Draft Compliance Scorecard. The group is to continue the work on the criteria for scoring and the development of the Compliance Scorecard. This was presented for consideration at the Forty-sixth Meeting of the SCCS in November 2021 and the criteria for developing the compliance scorecard and the M&E Framework was advanced.

4. Communication and Advocacy Strategy

This framework has been developed and is in use. The rolling out of various elements of the Strategy continues.

Next Steps

- Roll out of the Resource Mobilisation Strategy;
- Completion and finalisation of the M&E Framework and Compliance Score Card;
- A Mid-term review of the CARICOM RSDS is to be undertaken during 2024/2025 to identify any adjustments that are deemed necessary to advance the Strategy.
Country Feature: Implementation of the CARICOM RSDS in Suriname

The implementation of the CARICOM Regional Strategy for the Development of Statistics (RSDS) which is the Strategic Roadmap to developing Statistics in CARICOM, is country-driven and country owned. Commencing with the previous Issue (Issue 3), the Quarterly RSDS Newsletter “What’s New” features articles by CARICOM Countries on the implementation of the Strategy. In this issue, the work being undertaken by the Government of Suriname through the General Bureau of Statistics (GBS) is presented below.

INTRODUCTION

The Commission for Statistics (COMSTAT = NSS and NSO Governing Board) and the General Bureau of Statistics (NSO) of Suriname have taken steps to implement the RSDS in Suriname and in that context have taken initiatives to improve and maintain the quality of all official statistics produced and to produce a national strategy for the development of statistics.

It should be noted that Suriname was one of the first CARICOM countries to embrace the PARIS21 initiative of producing Strategic Plans for the Development and Maintenance of High Quality Statistics, so-called NSDS. Between December 2009 and May 2010, a commission headed by the NSO produced Suriname’s first Draft NSDS, i.e. NSDS 2010-2014.

An NSDS is a strategic plan for developing and maintaining statistical capacity over a period of 5-10 years, across all producers of official statistics, in other words, across the whole national statistical system (NSS). An RSDS is the regional equivalent of an NSDS.

CARICOM RSDS IN A NUTSHELL

The Ultimate Outcome to be achieved is, “an efficient CARICOM Statistical System (CSS) that is responsive to the national, regional and global development agenda, enabling a resilient Community with sustained economic growth and development.”

To achieve the ultimate outcome, a vision and mission statement were formulated and a 754 approach was developed: seven (7) core values, five (5) strategic priorities and four (4) strategic drivers / enablers. All of this can be laid out either in log-frame or in value chain format.

VISION

A CARICOM Statistical System (CSS) that is recognized for professional excellence and is the premier source of high-quality, harmonized statistics on the Community.
MISSION

To provide CARICOM and the Global Community with high quality, harmonized, national and regional statistics for evidence-based decision-making, research, the empowerment of the people and for the achievement of sustainable economic growth and development.

The seven (7) core values are: Professional Independence; Transparency, Integrity, Confidentiality, Quality, Accessibility and User Orientation / Customer Focus.

The five (5) strategic priorities (with their abbreviations / and number of strategic actions) are:
- Standards and Harmonization; (SH/3);
- Governance (GOV/5);
- Integrated Statistical Systems; (ISS/3);
- Innovation (INV/2); and
- Advocacy and Communication (AC/4).

The four (4) strategic drivers are:
- IT Infrastructure;
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Sustainable Capacity Building; and
- Gender Mainstreaming.

Adhering to the Core values is mainly a matter of complying with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, as well as being committed to a suitable Quality Assurance Framework. If and when necessary, suitable provisions need to be made in legislation and regulations.

SURINAME’S STEPS TOWARD RSDS IMPLEMENTATION

⇒ STEPS OF THE NSO (General Bureau of Statistics)
⇒ STEPS OF THE GOVERNING BOARD (Commission for Statistics / COMSTAT)

STEPS OF THE NSO

The following are to be undertaken:
- Strengthen all staff and adhere to regional and international standards and initiatives;
- Know / Specify portfolio and conduct SWOTS;
- Know the stakeholders, especially the users;
- Maintain / expand relationship with users;
- Maintain / expand strategic alliances;
- Secure funding for all activities.

To prepare for an NQAF and an NSDS, as well as for implementation of the RSDS, the NSO decided that its senior management and middle management need to be well versed in all regional (and international) strategic tools and other activities will be taken henceforth.

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Country Feature: Implementation of the CARICOM RSDS in Suriname

Strengthen all staff and adhere to regional and international standards and initiatives

It is well known that the NSO of Suriname had integrated the previous RSWP (2005 version) in its work programme, and has also integrated the current version of the RSWP (2012 version) in its annual and multi-annual work programme. Furthermore,

- All employees need to know the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (FPOS) and Staff members also need to know the CARICOM Code of Good Statistical Practices (CGSP) (SH);
- From August 2016, All Divisions (Economic, Social, Research & Planning) have to Report on State of Affairs regarding the CARICOM Action Plan for Statistics (SH, GOV);
- From June 2018 Divisional Heads and Sectional Heads get turns presenting on the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) as it applies to their unit and to demonstrate how to improve matters (SH);
- From April 2018 Divisional Heads, Sectional Heads and Research and Planning Division Staff have to report on the CARICOM RSDS (SH, GOV, ISS, INV, AC);
- From November 2019 all the Divisional and Sectional Heads and the Research Division staff have to sensitize their work contacts and as of January 2020 they have to report on progress during the monthly staff meetings (GOV, ISS);
- The Economics Statistics Division and the Research and Planning Division jointly produced a work plan to improve CS-ICT between January 2020 and June 2021 (SH);
- The Household Surveys Section commenced in April 2018 and the CPI Section in July 2019 with data collection utilizing tablet computers (INV).

In addition, From May to September 2019 several sessions and discussions were held.

Know / Specify portfolio and conduct SWOT

What do we have to / want to produce? (based on mission, other obligations – RSWP, SDG, CARICOM -core sets) (SH, GOV)
What can we actually produce? (resources, capacity, CC-core sets) (SH, GOV)

The results of the Portfolio activities (a, b above): were as follows:

\[
\text{Have to + want to produce} = 1038 (779+259) \\
\text{Actually produce} = 626 (80\% \text{ of have to and } 60\% \text{ of total})
\]

Moreover,

All Divisions (Economic Statistics, Social Statistics, Research and Planning, HRM) produced divisional SWOTs and NSO SWOTs, which were thoroughly discussed (SH)

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Country Feature: Implementation of the CARICOM RSDS in Suriname

Know the stakeholders, especially the users / Maintain / Expand relationship with users (AC)

To Know: Have an inventory (since 2017) of stakeholders / users and their possible roles.

Stakeholders / Users can be:
- Commission for Statistics
- NSO personnel
- Government of Suriname (All ministries, especially parent ministry, i.e. Finance)
- Governments (Regional & International)
- Central Bank of Suriname
- National Planning Office
- Regional Organizations (CARICOM and Subsidiary organizations)
- International Organizations (UN+, IMF, World Bank, IADB, IsDB)
- Research institutions (analysts, researchers)
- Mass Media (Radio, TV, Newspaper)
- Businesses & Private Sector
- Trade Unions
- Educational institutions plus their students
- The public at large

Possible roles of stakeholders / users
- Use the correct data and always take feedback from the NSO’s at heart
- Evidence Based Policy & Planning
- Baseline Studies and Data Assessments
- Project proposals and implementations
- (Inter)national reporting
- Provide Funding for all kinds of projects
- Increase the engagement of Governments for Funding / Other assistance
- Workshops and Training for improving and promoting Data and Dissemination
- Communicate plans

To Maintain/ Expand relationships: (AC)

- Analyse information requests
- Use website analytics
- User-Producer Seminars (on hold because of bad economic conditions, will be resumed)
- Conduct user satisfaction surveys (NSO stopped doing this because of terrible response rates, but will resume soon)
- Improve website, especially access, coverage and openness

Let us zoom in on Analyze information requests and use website analytics:

- What information is requested / frequency / format?
- What do website visitors download most?
- Who are the website visitors?
- How many return visitors are there and how many first timers?

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The NSO also heavily invested (with thanks to UNICEF) into improvement of the website, to be better in touch with stakeholders but also to improve dissemination of results. (AC)

- Home page is user friendly, structured, there are more search options
- More downloads possible
- Bilingual (Dutch & English) website: Dutch part was finished in April 2019 and the English part in October 2019 (to coincide with Caribbean Statistics Day)
- Key figures and links to highlights on the homepage
- Links to Social Media
- Website training for updating website conducted in November 2019.

Do we know who visits our website? To a certain extent, because we have more than 100,000 visitors to our website, but circa 500 choose to fill out the poll in 2017 and 2018 and circa 1200 in 2019. The “jump” after we revamped our website is encouraging.

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*: As reported before the English part of the renewed website was completed in October 2019. **: The website was mostly “down” in February and March 2019, whilst being revamped.

Maintain / expand strategic alliances (limited herein to national alliances) (GOV)
In undertaking efforts at initiating system-wide NSDS and NQAF activities, in line with their regional counterparts, the Suriname Commission for Statistics (COMSTAT), sent out, in August 2019, a Concept Note (“Challenges and the Strategy for Suriname’s NSS”) to all major producers of Official Statistics in Suriname.

COMSTAT requested from each producer:
- SWOT of the Producer and its major subsidiaries
- SWOT of the NSS
- Inputs for a National Consensus building symposium and start up ideas for a long term strategy

Expected Outcome: 10 Year Statistics Strategy

The envisaged working method of COMSTAT is that there are to be several rounds of exchange and that in the first round of the exchange of views, the key stakeholders who are represented in COMSTAT according to the Statistical Act 2002, are to be closely involved in the planning and implementation of this activity. After the initial internal preparatory consultation on this initiative of COMSTAT, after feedback has been received, the aim, the program and the format of the Symposium will be submitted for comment. Implementation will then take place in close consultation with the NSO, regional and international development partners.

Simultaneously with the initial preparatory consultation, a team of consultants will be engaged to conduct a Situation Analysis, which needs to concentrate on:
- Legislation and institutional framework

Closing remarks - Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges in pursuing NSDS, QAF and RSDS:
- Low/no affinity for adequate Official Statistics
- IDPs need to act in accordance with the statistics acts of countries (see Statement of the 43rd SCCS)
- Some changes in legislation and regulations required (re: new data sources and administrative data) but also entails danger
- Human Resources/Staff turnover and Capacities/Internal communication
- Financial resources/Late and reduced Transfers to the NSO
- Funds to keep the website and other ICT requirements up-to-date
- DevInfo dissemination software will soon stop working. What is next?
- Lots of data only available at National level – too little disaggregated data on the website/Workload to achieve proper level of Data openness
- Data gaps for all major frameworks, e.g. SDGs, FDES, UNGEI, CS Indicators
- Staffing issues including Staff turnover at the major Stakeholders, means more, time consuming efforts to maintain relations
- Reorganization of government departments.

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Country Feature: Implementation of the CARICOM RSDS in Grenada

**Opportunities** in pursuing NSDS, QAF and RSDS:

- Statistics Champions required at the highest level.
- RSWP execution, Regional Action Plan for Statistics and all SDG related capacity building initiatives
- Improve relationships with IDPs to support NQAF, NSDS and RSDS activities, especially in the light of Agenda 2030
- Chances to strengthen the PR Unit and the Library
- Chances to strengthen the EDP (= IT) Section
- Internships provided by NSO to students and trainees of other partners
- South/South collaboration
- Upcoming projects to retain current staff and attract new staff (continuous ICP activities, 123 Survey 2020/2021, Population Census 2022)
- Generally positive media attention.