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Benefits of NSS and NSO collaboration

Introduction

Co-operation between statistical societies and statistical offices is not new. It has practically existed since the origin of these institutions.

So collaboration is not new,... but is it more RELEVANT TODAY?

I would say yes. Very much so. Let me approach this through a **Development point of view**.

I guess we all agree that:

- Statistics should support individual welfare, and the common good.
- “Quality Statistics” are necessary for **Development**. This issue is crucial in this century of profound change, in this transformational moment, and as we face the **digital future**.

As we all know, the perspective on **how to attain Development**, has changed in recent times.

Development is something **more complex** from what we thought before. **Over simplifying**, in some countries we passed from the belief that it could be reached with only good planning from The State,... to a view that it would be reached with “total faith” in Free Markets.

Now we sustain –throughout- that it depends on a multiplicity of factors,... and of **many stakeholders**.

In fact, the name of the game for **Development** in this 21st century is **Public-Private Strategic Alliances or Partnerships**, including Civil Society within the “Private”. The Agenda is still Competitiveness, Rule of Law, Integration, Social Development, etc., etc. but now partnerships are a premier instrument.

This is evident when we read the current Development Plans of Countries, when we analyze the policies for the Sustainable Development Goals, when we see the conclusions of Summits of Heads of State or meetings of International Organizations (like the UN, World Economic Forum, Development Banks and OECD). Also, when we evaluate the ESG programs of Corporations. Partnerships are a way to accelerate human progress.

Without the revitalized participation of the private sector, civil society and **scientific organizations**, public sector efforts alone would not deliver on the goals.

Indeed Development is a collective task.

Transformative partnerships exist in all sectors. And they are here to stay.

The same applies to Statistics.

Partnerships in Statistics

Partnerships are needed to create a meaningful information system, to construct a well-informed society, and to ensure the relevant use of statistics. To inform public debates, to support business decisions, and to nurture public policies. In short, to support development itself.

Within the **many partnerships** required in statistics, the one between National Statistical Offices and National Statistical Societies stands out.

In particular, what are the **benefits for a Statistical Office of this Partnership?**

Among others, I would like to mention the following 10 items of valuable support from **Statistical Societies to Statistical Offices**, thinking primarily of Developing Countries. Yet, I realize that many offices worldwide face the same issues.

- 1) First, **Technical Advisor**: Statistical Societies are –among others- an important “technical advisor” to Statistical Offices on what to measure, on the many stages of project preparation, and on quality control at execution. In the dynamic world of today deciding what to measure and how to do so requires a collective effort.

- 2) Second, **Methodologies**: they can help identifying “better methodologies” to be used by the Statistical Office. They are a necessary complement to the expertise of internal staff, specially in core projects such as sample surveys, censuses or derived statistics.

- 3) Third, **Innovation**: they are a “source of innovation”, particularly of frontier themes, such as green accounts, information on social physics, measurement of new digital services, or use of relevant big data to enhance data inputs.
The Statistical Society is the **premier network of Statisticians** in a country. They are essential players in the consultation process and in discussion fora of the NSO.

- 4) Fourth, **Dissemination**: It is important to note that, for many, the task of a Statistical Office does not end when data is produced and put into a press release, but until it is **properly understood and used**. The Statistical Society can be an important ally for this. They constitute an “expert voice” to support dissemination and professional interpretation of official statistics.

- 5) Five, **Statistical Culture**: they are also a relevant actor to communicate the value of Statistics, to increase statistical literacy, and to promote the “Statistical culture” of Society. Their action contributes to informed judgements, to the pertinent use of quality statistics, and to avoid people being victims of **misinformation**. This is an important contribution particularly with so much data going around, by a multiplicity of providers.
In a society that is **intensely connected** –like we currently have- **misinformation** is easily created and easily disseminated at great scale, with potential negative effect on official statistics. Misinformation is one of the greatest threats to modern societies. Statistics are at the heart of the dilemma between the “right to information” and the “right to freedom of expression”. The equilibrium between these **two human rights** is complex. But statistical truth should never be darkened. Many recommendations exist in this area, and Statistical Societies **can support** a number of the actions required to address this challenge of modern societies.

- 6) Six, **Training**: Statistical Societies are a valuable resource of talent to “train” official statisticians. At INEGI, the Mexican Official Statistical Agency, covering also geographic information, we established our own Academy or Training Center and the Statistical Society, called Asociación Mexicana de Estadística AME, supported the definition of meaningful curricula and provided teaching staff.
- 7) Seven, **Planning**: Statistical Societies –among others- can influence positively the forward looking Statistical Development Plans, addressing the changing needs of our society and the new technologies.
- 8) Eight, **Budget**: they are a stakeholder that can support -via its voice- “budget allocations” by fiscal authorities and parliaments. Many sectors have very active budget advocacy groups, and we should also have them.
- 9) Nine, **Ethics**: Statistical Societies can carry out vigorous dissemination of our “Code of Ethics” advancing in the excellence of the profession. This also counteracts intensions of influence or manipulation of numbers by external or internal sources. And
- 10) Ten, **Continuity of efforts**: Societies can contribute to formalize the partnership via an MOU and monitor this to reinforce persistency of activities, avoiding interruption due to changes of leadership in the NSO.

In all, the collaboration of Statistical Societies is a valuable asset for the statistical development in a country. Through it, Statistical Offices are more efficient, more forward looking, impact driven and more responsive and trusted organizations.

Best practices

Now, I would like to illustrate these points with concrete examples –perhaps “good practices”- from a developing country. Although they are examples from the past, I think **they are revealing, and have current relevance due to recent statistical projects carried out in the middle of Covid.**

I was working as Director of the ISI Permanent Office in The Netherlands, at the end of the 80’s, and I received a call from the President Elect of Mexico.

I was to return to my country and take the post of President of INEGI, the official national statistical agency. So I packed my things, welcomed Denise Lievesley as the new ISI Director, and went to Mexico.

A few days after my arrival, two colleagues visited me and said they were very concerned.

We were one year away from doing the Population and Housing Census of 1990, in a country that by surface and population was within the 15 largest in the world.

They shared with me the story of the **many serious problems** of the previous census of the year 1980, which was done under very difficult conditions.

As a result of these severe problems, data quality was bad. Many large areas were left uncovered. They shared that what the technicians did, at the time, to fill the gaps and provide proxy figures, was to use the best available information, with doubtful quality, and population projections. That was the source of the census figures in numerous urban and rural areas. The problems also implied that there was **no effective sampling frame**, affecting statistical activities for the following years.

They expected that there would be **many surprises** when the figures of the new census came out, the **first census** elaborated by INEGI.

I mentioned to them that our task was to realize the best possible 1990 census, with the highest possible quality, and report the real situation of the country. **It was a serious responsibility**, and we could not use the failed procedures of the past.

So I called upon the Statistical Society (AME) and Academia. Together with this collective expertise, a new methodology was defined. This is *Contribution number 1*. It was totally different from the long history of previous censuses. Demographers also had a notable participation.

The 1990 Census was path breaking. **The methodology defined in this partnership was unique.** It was the first census with hired and payed census takers. The team was composed of close to one million interviewers, mostly young and well trained. Previously, censuses were taken in one single day with un-paid citizens called for the task, and generally insufficiently trained. Now we did three independent national

counts, spread apart in the calendar. The last count lasted 5 days. Quality control was embedded in all stages. All the cartography was updated and digitized. For the first time, timely information was to be provided and at very detailed geographical units. Therefore, all sectors of society could easily audit the figures.

When we had the results, an event was organized in the Presidential Residence “Los Pinos”; The President, his cabinet, all 31 governors, many VIP’s, and the press had been invited and were to be there. I was to present the results. Everything was ready. Yet, I received a call from the Office of the President, the night before. “We are cancelling the event”. A Minister has told the President “it is going to be a scandal”.

The figures did NOT coincide with the **electoral role** used in the national and local elections, nor with the budget given to States and Municipalities through the years. Budget unfairness became evident. They also showed that representation in the Parliament was widely incorrect. Official population projections were totally wrong in numerous geographic areas. They said “You better deal by yourself with the dissemination of the results. It is better to do it at technical level only.” So I did, instead of the event at “Los Pinos”, we announced the event would be only with the press and at the Mexico City INEGI office. To make things “sweeter” we invited the press for lunch. There, I gave the results. **They were tough days.**

The establishment **roared with the figures**. It was a tough battle, particularly through the media and the Congress.

We had to challenge Governors, Mayors and institutions that had “different data”. We were transparent about our methodologies, gave figures at block level, and asked them to justify what was the basis for the calculation of the “alternative data”.

Little by little people became convinced that the **INEGI Census figures were right**. In a way, it was the statistical birth of a modern system.

The Statistical Society, together with other professionals, participated in the definition of the Census from the start, and to a large extent they felt the project as their own. Their participation at this difficult moment was crucial. They publicly explained the reason behind the new methodology. Contribution number 2. They also communicated international experiences. Contribution number 3. It was an

independent expert voice, that later also contributed to the proper interpretation of results. *Contribution number 4.*

Many things were adjusted due to the results of this census.

The allocation of fiscal resources,... District boundaries for the Congress,... population projections,... socio-economic assessments,... territorial planning,... and priority regions for poverty alleviation.

Also, as a result of these figures reflecting reality, a new electoral role had to be done for Mexico. It was a “house by house” visit by the electoral authority and it gave a photo ID for citizens to vote. **In a way, this Census was also a crucial element for the democratic transition of Mexico. So, for those that value Democracy here is a concrete example of another valuable contribution obtained through the collaboration between the Statistical Society and the Statistical Office. Indeed, not a minor achievement.**

The shared professional values between the Statistical Society and the Statistical Office, worked in favor of the information system of the country.

We should never underestimate the value of professional statisticians well interconnected. Even a small number of them can create a powerful voice... and impact. This story is only one of many examples that could be cited from other projects and from other countries. **It is good to have a National Statistical Society.**

The lesson to us was clear. When data reflects reality, and you are placed with a situation like the one described, you have to tighten up your stomach and weather out the storm, however tough. **And do Partnerships, Partnerships with the profession, and with others, in a transparent way! In the end the truth will do its work. The professional Society and Academia played their role. INEGI came out of this statistical event with a tremendous positive reputation, which gave it credibility, at a time when public institutions were not at the best of image. INEGI was recognized as a transparent institution, with scientific and scholarly conduct. INEGI has continued to improve through the years with relevant transformations.**

Support to National Statistical Societies

To end, the collaboration between Statistical Societies and Offices should go both ways. INEGI realized the value and the importance of **supporting** the Statistical Society, which despite its important contributions was still **not mature enough**. Many actions supporting the Statistical Society were implemented.

- i. First, **Infrastructure**: provide the Society with an office to operate, with telephone, electricity, computer systems etc. for the Secretariat (eg. like CBS in The Netherlands does for ISI).
- ii. Second, **Independence**: respect the autonomy and By-Laws of the Society and ensure its independence. Critical opinions of the Statistical Community can often be the best contribution to a project carried out by a Statistical Office. Respect of their autonomy is important.
- iii. Third, **Publications**: print their journal and Congress Proceedings and support electronic access and digital dissemination. INEGI had and has a large publishing and computer network infrastructure, so we moved in this direction respecting the editors and authors independence. Web link at INEGI to the Societies home page was also useful.
- iv. Fourth, **Meetings**: support regional, national and international events of the Statistical Society, via installations, grants for attendance, and other resources. Also, support webinars and hybrid events.
- v. Five, **Jobs**: disseminate openings in the Statistical Office via the Statistical Society.
- vi. Six, **Scholarships**: support advocacy of post-graduate scholarships for statisticians, in relevant funding institutions, national and international.
- vii. Seven, **Memberships**: support efforts to increase membership in the Statistical Society, with the backing of new benefits to members. Also, support the regional integration of National Societies. And

viii. Eight, **Awards**: Sponsor professional awards given by the Statistical Society.

In the developing world this **support is still insufficient** and **needs to be persistent**. There is also an important role here for the ISI and I am sure other colleagues will address this.

It is clear that working together, and supporting each other, we can deliver a better response. **Improved cooperation is of mutual benefit**. As Steve Penneck has said, Statistical Offices are not only for civil servants, and Statistical Societies are not only for academics. I believe we share the same **guiding principles** of our profession, so we should **jointly** put them to work, materializing the best synergies. Together we can provide “quality statistics” to support individual welfare and the common good. Also, together we can increase visibility of our discipline.

Conclusion:

We are living a period of **good technological fortune for all**,... (certainly for Statistical Offices... and for Statistical Societies). New technologies are changing management processes. We need to use technology wisely.

But also, we are in a period of **innovative Public Private Partnerships**, and we should reinforce them in Statistics to optimize resources and knowledge.

Digital Technology makes further cooperation *easier and possible*, but it is **Partnerships** that makes further cooperation *happen*.

In this Era of the so called “**Information Society**”, the “**Digital World**” and the “**Economy of Data**”, Statistics is an essential science. It is crucial to have a **Solid** Statistical Profession,... **Inclusive** Statistical Societies,... and **Modern** Statistical Offices to produce and use **Statistics for better lives**.

I believe it is a historic opportunity and challenge,... and synergies are a must. We should build and ensure a **Culture of Collaboration** for the benefit of Statistics... and for the benefit of socio economic Development.