A HANDBOOK IN COMMUNICATIONS FOR AFRICAN STATISTICAL AGENCIES

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Content

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AfDB   African Development Bank

AU   African Union

AUC   African Union Commission

AUSTAT   The African Union Statistics Division

DG   Director General

EU   European Union

EUROSTAT   Statistical office of the EU inside the European Commission

FPOS   Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

GA   Google Analytics

IMF   International Monetary Fund

KPIs   Key Performance Indicators

MP   Member of parliament

UNECA   United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

NSI   National Statistical Institutes

NSO   National Statistical Office

PAS   Pan African Statistics Programme

SASQAF   South African Statistical Quality Assurance Framework

SDDS   Special Data Dissemination Standard

STATAFRIC   Institute of Statistics of the African Union

SWOT   Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

UN   United Nations

Introduction

Statistical offices all over the world make more and better statistics every day. Statistical tools are better, official registries are better, and methods for conducting surveys are improving all the time. However, at the same time a lot of this work is futile if statistics do not reach the intended users.

Over the last 20 years, ways of communicating have changed more rapidly than ever before in human history. New technology – internet, mobile phones, social media and more – has become common. And with new technology comes new ways of communicating and consuming information. This gives National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) new opportunities to reach ever more users in new and interesting ways, and to let official statistics play an increasingly important role in society. At the same time as new opportunities arise, many NSIs still disseminate and communicate in more or less the same way as they have always done. There are many reasons for this. Statistics is in nature a conservative "business", with a lot of emphasis on time series and repetitive work. Statisticians are often very cautious and prefer not to open to disapproval or criticism. In many countries, there is a long tradition for a more limited dissemination, mostly to governmental organizations. And of course, up-to-date communication is both difficult and sometimes expensive.

The advice under is written specifically for African statistical institutions. In many statistical agencies in Africa, there is a huge gap between basic dissemination and the general communication goals of today. In these cases, it makes more sense to build the basic structure for good dissemination, rather than embarking on more high-flying adventures in social media and video production. But remember – it is possible to have more than one thought in your head at the same time. You can both build a decent web structure for your tables and learn how to build a Twitter, Facebook or Instagram account at the same time.

These guidelines are meant to give some easy insight on where to start and what to prioritize in the field of communication within a statistical agency that does not have too much experience in these matters. The advice given are by no way complete, and on most matters, there are several ways to succeed. As communication, use of statistics and technology are prone to keep developing and changing ever as rapidly in the future as well, our hope is that these guidelines are used as a living document and updated whenever needed.

Many African statistical institutions struggle with advocacy issues, mainly how to be treated as the (only) independent provider of official statistics within the government, the bureaucracy and the public alike. To deal with these issues, you of course have to play on a lot more strings than communication can offer alone, but it will always pay off to include some of the elements on corporate communication that is included in these guidelines.

At the same time the (original) author of these guidelines has to put in a firm disclaimer. Africa is a huge continent and at least as many NSIs with very dissimilar priorities and obstacles. It is impossible to make guidelines for communication that will suit all perfectly. To make the best of your restricted communication resources, you have to have detailed knowledge of your own surroundings. Even though most of sources for the guidelines come from people with a lot of knowledge of the continent, it can never beat experience from the ground. My hope is that the African NSIs will share their experiences on communication in the years to come – both positive and negative – and let this be a living document on how to communicate statistics in Africa.

Eventually, these guidelines mention some examples of good practices by some African countries. These were presented during several dissemination and public relation workshops in 2018 and 2019 organized throughout the Pan African Statistics programme, which the current document is part of.

1. Why put an effort in communication?

No statistical output has any value unless it reaches its intended users. For many statisticians, the user they probably have in mind is someone working in a government agency or other official organizations, and who is interested in almost every detail in the statistics. Or they don't think of any known user at all. Without a plan to disseminate and communicate every statistic produced, they will most probably do not reach any intended user group, whether that is the public, the media, students or government organizations. For a national statistical institute, it is important to reach most parts of the society, but with more or less specialized content. The public needs statistics to get a broader understanding of facts and developments and to ensure democratic control over politics put in place, the bureaucracy and politicians need statistics to make and improve politics, and the media is a crucial facilitator in both these respects. For the NSI, it is also very important to show results from surveys and other administrative sources to keep and increase trust and reputation in the public, and to keep or even increase funding over the national budget.

National statistical institutes strongly believe that statistics are vital to build democracies and improve among others trade, health, education, communities and nations. If your NSI really mean that, you should make sure our product is used properly.

1.1. New trends in communicating statistics

Communicating and disseminating statistics have become both easier and more difficult over the last few years. New and easy-to-use communication channels, cheaper and better internet tools, and a better educated public give new and improved possibilities. Competition on data from huge providers of big data, more and more demanding users and information overload in general, are some of the obstacles for every statistical institute in the world.

But the most important "trend" in communication over the last few decades, is that changes come at a faster speed than ever before. These means communication departments within NSIs also have to be able to change their ways of work faster than they used to. Shifting the focus towards the demand and user side, engaging in dialogue with users, promoting data literacy programs and engaging with the media are some key issues. Refining the NSI's understanding of how statistics are used will be a priority in the years to come.

Some communication initiatives can be expensive, but today it is also possible to do a lot of good communication at a very low cost. Social media is for instance free to use, as are many other communication tools. This will be dealt with later in this document.

African NSIs should also remember that there is very little difference between their main users, and the users of statistics in other parts of the world. The use of social media, internet, mobile phones, google, etc., is very much the same all over the world.

2. *Making a communication strategy, working plan and policies*

As with statistics, it is impossible to do everything at once in the field of communication. Some matters must get priority over others, both in the short and the long run. A communication strategy will help you organize this better.

A communication strategy is designed to help you and your organization communicate effectively and meet core organizational objectives.

The communication strategy does not have to be very long, nor very detailed. The main objective is to show what is prioritized in the next period.

The communication department should make the priorities and write the strategy based on their specialist knowledge. At the same time, the entire organization must have ownership over the strategy and its priorities. The top management should endorse the strategy and the general direction of the action plan. It is important that the relevant stakeholders feel a sense of ownership to the strategy.

● The communication strategy must be built on the priorities in the strategy of the entire organization

● The communication strategy just shows direction. In addition, the organization should have a yearly working/action plan that goes in detail on what work is to be done

● In addition to a strategy and working plan, you should also have a set of policies for dissemination and communication. Some example of fields that should have a communication policy:
   - Running of website
   - How to disseminate statistics
   - How to correct errors
   - Ownership and use of social media

● The communication strategy should both be achievable and something to stretch after

● It should be limited in time – for example four years

● It should not be too detailed, just make out priorities. Details are for working plans and policies

● Internal communication is a key element in any communication strategy. i.e. how to make the entire organization take ownership to the strategy.

At the same time – do not let the strategy come in the way of publishing reliable and understandable figures. Day to day communication of quality statistics is more important than fulfilling the most difficult strategic goals.

The strategy should also be accepted by central users, both in and outside of the agency. The main purpose of involving the users is to let them tell us how we could improve the quality of the statistics. It is also easier to tell them why we are making these priorities if they have had a saying to begin with.

2.1. *Guidelines for creating an external communications strategy*

This section outlines some main elements and steps for developing a comprehensive external communications strategy, and also provides suggestions for an implementation plan. Each statistical organization is unique, and the guidelines should be adapted to suit the needs of individual organizations.

These are some elements to consider while making a communication strategy:

● **values and principles** – what do you see as the main values of your agency? For instance – if you want the NSI to be the main provider of official statistics in your country, then this has to be a part of the communication strategy

● **communications objectives** – goals for messages and programs of communication. For instance – generating interest in statistics among media or the public

● **audience segmentation** – how to reach different user groups. User groups can be wide like the public, the media, government officials, students, NGOs or more narrowed down like local media, pupils in upper secondary schools, etc.

● **communication channels** – web, print, social media, speeches etc.

Before starting on the strategy, it might be a good idea to conduct a SWOT analysis—What are your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats? Strengths and weaknesses relate to the internal environment. Opportunities and threats relate to the external environment.

A lot more on how to make a communication strategy can be found in the documents linked in the bottom, or through a google search.

2.2.
Working plan

To achieve the goals in the strategy, it is important to work out yearly (or more often) working/action plans. These should be more detailed on what the organization should do on the field of communication within a shorter period of time. It is probably impossible to start with and achieve all parts of the strategy at the same time. The communication department should make the priorities in the working plan and secure commitment with top management and organization. While making the working plan, it is also important to take into consideration:

● how much resources do you have to conduct all your tasks? It is not recommended to build a castle in the skies by promising more than you can hold. Be realistic, and rather be able to deliver more than promised at the end of the year than the opposite.

● what does the organization actually need right now? If you have bad relations with the media, maybe you should start there. Or if the organization is on very different levels, perhaps you should start with internal communication. Understand the organization's needs – remember that communication is on behalf of the entire NSI.

● are there big events in the organization within the next year that need special focus? i.e. census, parliamentary elections, seminars, big surveys, major revisions etc. A lot of strategic work can be done while communicating actual statistics.

2.3.
Communication policies

Communication and dissemination policies explain how you do your communication in practice, and should be more long lived than strategies and working plans. A document, or documents, on statistical dissemination policy and practice is published for the benefit of users and the public at large, and for the entire organization. As for the strategy and the working plan, the communication department should be in charge of implementing and updating all communication policies.

For a statistical agency, it is important to have some clear principles of time of release for new products, equal treatment of users, how to correct errors etc. It is also important to have principles for internal use on dissemination. On some levels, a dissemination policy can be very basic. For instance, a statement like "All statistics produced by the agency should be published on the website" could be included in the policy.

Communication policies is also a way for the communication department and the rest of the organization to "agree on some communication aspects, in order to get more time to work on strategic issues. For example, table formats to be used in publications, fonts, colors, text length etc.

Some policies are very tightly connected to the strategy. For instance, it could be a strategic goal to be more visible on Facebook. Exactly how to do it, what posts to make (visualisations, photos, links to articles etc.), when to release, user target groups etc. are in the border area between strategy and policy. In this example, it could be easier and less time consuming to wait with the policy until the NSI gets some experience with Facebook.

Even if communication policies are more long lived than strategies, they should still be treated as living documents and be updated when needed.

EXAMPLES ON GOOD PRACTICE FROM AFRICAN COUNTRIES
● **Botswana** has a dissemination policy, which could be further developed in the future. Their policy is based on a Statistics Act, UN FPOS and IMF SDDS.

3. *Communication with users*

Statistical products have no value if they are not used. And it should be a goal that the statistics are used by as many as possible within the targeted user group(s). From the work with the strategy, you will know which users are the most important for your agency over the next few years. You will have to focus on these, but without forgetting the others. With most statistical products it is also possible to target one user group, but also make "side products" that communicate well with others.

3.1. *General principles*

Different user groups need different approaches in communication. There are however some main principles in user communication, and some general ways to improve this . Here are some main ones that are important for NSIs:

● **Accessibility:** all your statistics and other statistical products should be available for a variety of users. Preferably, through a web site, but other channels should also be used (see more in chapter on Channels).

● **Impartiality and Objectivity:** Statistical authorities should develop, produce and disseminate statistics and other statistical products respecting scientific independence;

● **Timeliness and Punctuality:** Statistics should be released in a timely and punctual manner;

● **Segmentation and profiling:** the same statistical product should communicate with different user groups, at least through different layers of complexity;

● **Continuous and frequent:** statistics is in nature continuous and the user dialogue should keep this in mind. The users should expect to find results from previous publications, and get an idea when the next release is expected, both on the statistics page and in an advanced release calendar;

● **Transparency:** Be honest and transparent about potential errors and weaknesses in the material. This increases trust in your statistics. It is also important to have accessible and understandable metadata.

● **Statistics is difficult to understand** for many users. Help usability and understanding through help texts, and – above all – a good dissemination practice

It is a very good idea to set up a system where you get feedback from users, whether the statistics you provide them with are fit for purpose, or if there are changes to be made. This can be done in several ways with one-to-one dialogue, focus groups, questionnaires/ surveys etc.

Your agency should also have a contact point where all members of the public can get in touch with you both to get answers to questions about statistics, and to get feedback. Many statistical agencies have information centers where users can contact directly either through phone, e-mail or via social media. Some even offer the public to visit them.

When you are conducting a survey, remember you have to communicate with users both before, during and after the data collection.

Users and their use of statistics vary over time. Today, the biggest "trend" in information consumption is information overload. This means most, if not all, users have less time than ever to get, comprehend and understand a message, before they have moved on to something else. For a statistical agency, this means we have to be better than ever on keeping things short, concise and easy to understand (KISS principle).

3.2.
Different user groups, different approaches

Some user groups are more important than others, regardless of the strategy. The media is one of the most important and is treated in a separate chapter below. Apart from the media, it might make sense to divide your users into three for a start: Government/ officials, experts and the general public.

Government/officials: This is probably the most important user group for the NSI, as they are both the main users of most of your statistics and provides the bulk of funding for the agency. This (big) group must be communicated with in several ways (see corporate communication below), but as users of statistics it is important to remember that ministers and other officials don't necessarily understand more statistics than an average person. They are usually interested in statistics, but they still need the data explained. It is also important to remember that many in this group don't have a lot of time to read long texts.

Experts: Statisticians are experts on their fields, and most of them picture other experts as the main users of statistics as well. Experts should in general be satisfied with usable data sets, provided in a format they can work with, i.e. in Excel or through a database. Experts would also like good and usable meta data along with the data sets. Text dissemination should be for other user groups than experts.

The public: This is of course a huge and very diverse group. To make it smaller and more manageable, it could rather be the part of the public that, to some extent, could be interested in one or more of your statistics. The most important thing to remember here, is that the public rarely is interested in statistics as such. They are interested in statistics only in so far as they overlap their existing interests. Statistics on popular subjects should therefore be given special prominence and be presented in words that are generally comprehensible. A well-structured website is a website that makes the most sought-after numbers easily accessible to the public.

There are of course several other user groups as well that your agency might find as or even more important according to your communication strategy – national and international organizations, industry and commerce, other statistical agencies etc. What is most important is that you try to find out as much as possible about your main users and communicate with them in a way that works for all of you and that makes your statistics both used and understood.

Using personas could be a good way of conceptualizing your different users. Personas is simply a way of personalizing your different user groups by giving them names, genders and different sets of characteristics. By using personas, it can be easier to make statistical products that reach their intended user groups. Read more about personas in the appendix.

EXAMPLES ON GOOD PRACTICE FROM AFRICAN COUNTRIES

● **Mozambique's** experience on profiling users: user segmentation is crucial. There are some studies to develop user management system. Their focus is to deliver the information to right users.

● **Statistics South Africa** (Stats SA) has a marketing strategy, which is one of best practices. The strategy has 15 market segments. These documents should cover what statistics are to be used for which users. Relevance is another critical dimension.

● **South Africa** tries to engage users, using some interesting topics like World cake day, inflation on eggs.

4. Media

Even though all users are important, the media is one user group that needs special attention. The media represents an important channel to the outside world. Without this channel, reaching out to the public at large and fulfilling our role as a provider of objective and relevant statistical information would become increasingly difficult – if not impossible. Having a good relationship with the media and journalists is vital for every statistical agency in order to succeed.

In addition, media are important in increasing the visibility and improving the reputation of the NSI and creating confidence and trust in official statistics, which in turn will increase the public support for the national statistical organisations.

In its basic form, getting media's attention is quite easy. Statisticians have stories to be told, while the journalists need stories to tell. Sometimes it is that easy, but most of the time you have to put up quite a bit of work to get that media coverage.

In some respects, it has become even harder over the years for a statistical agency to get media coverage for their products. Media companies employ fewer and fewer journalists, and at the same time the journalists left have to create more and more stories. Often, they also have to make the same story for several formats – web, print, video etc. It is also a trend that there are fewer journalists with a special field of expertise, like economy or finance.

However, these shifting trends in the media landscape also gives opportunities for a statistical agency if you know how to use them right. Following are some advice on how to work towards the media for an NSI in 2020:

● **Know your own media landscape.** This is hopefully self-obvious, but it still makes sense to spend some time scanning your own surroundings. What are the main news sites in your country? Which newspaper is most trusted among the elite? Which journalists write the most about topics you have statistics on? Which journalists have you been in contact with before, and where are they now? What are the most popular news shows on radio? If there are several official languages in your country, what are the main news providers for each? The more you know about the media of your country, the easier it is to make good media strategies and get good and right coverage for your statistics.

● **Write shorter and more angled press releases.** It is in statistics' and statisticians' nature to always paint the big picture with all reservations and explanations included. This has never been a good way to get media attention, and even less so in a time where journalists seldom have time to dig into long and difficult texts. The better, clearer and more news worthy press releases you make, the easier it is for a journalist to use it. Always start with the most important and newsworthy finding. The news article is a well proven format for press releases, with a short title, a short first paragraph, and a focused text.

● **Use your in-house experts.** Media is more and more person focused, with experts, politicians, heads of organizations, etc. "telling" and explaining the news story to the journalist. You have your country's main experts on statistics in-house, and you should use them actively in communication activities.

- Make quotes in a press release from the leading statistician, a head of division, director or the DG. This gives the media an opportunity to highlight a quote in the news story and even print a photo. It also gives the journalist an easy contact point within the NSI.

- Give media training to (some) statisticians. Talking to journalists and giving interviews is not on top of most statisticians' wish lists. It is easy to feel insecure meeting the media, and journalists and statisticians also often speak a very different language. It is very worthwhile to work with statisticians and prepare them on how to deal with journalists. Talking understandable (and even interesting), where to look while on TV, how to answer questions where you don't have an answer etc., should be included in such training. It might be that you and/or your staff also have some insecurities dealing with the media, but remember you know it better than any statistician within your institute.

- Radio is a very important medium in many African countries. It makes sense to work actively with some staff to make them interesting for radio journalists and radio hosts. Use the same basis as in regular media training, but put more emphasis on how to

make an interesting conversation than how to give statistical facts. Radio often needs good voices and free talking more than hard news, and it is your job to find and develop these voices within your organization.

- Sometimes interviews don't go as well as you hoped and planned for. Don't let that get under your skin. Giving good interviews needs practice, and while you can teach and learn a lot through media training, the only way to really get to know how to do it is to try and learn from the mistakes.

● **Let journalists feel like they are treated exclusively.** It is in the nature of journalism to try to find "scoops" and exclusive stories to report. This is often very difficult for an NSI, as equal treatment and timely publishing is in our nature. We can of course never give the latest CPI-figures exclusively to just one journalist. But there are many ways to still give that feeling to journalists.

- Pre-publishing, you can contact select journalists and give the basic content of the statistics or report, but without giving away the actual numbers. If you also have a (media-trained) statisticians to offer for an early morning interview on the day of release, you have a lot better chance of getting media coverage than by just sending out press releases by e-mail.

- Post-publishing, you can go through the material in the statistics or report and see if there are some angles and stories that no media has used yet. If there is, you can put together a short summary and contact a journalist directly.

- These two options may feel very out of character for how an NSI communicates and disseminates statistics, but it is fully in line with how the media is developing. It still makes sense for your communication team to get some sort of a mandate from the top management before dealing with separate journalists in this way.

● **Press conferences for the biggest news.** Most NSIs have good experiences with running press conferences, and this is still definitely a good way of communicating. However, as journalists both have less and less time, and more and more pressure to find exclusive stories, you should only put an effort into running press conferences when you have something really good to communicate. A journalist should be sure to have a story to bring back to her editors when spending time at a press conference. One way of securing this, is to offer separate interviews with leading statisticians during or immediately after the press conference.

● **Give priority to journalists.** All journalists are on a tight schedule, often with a story to finish before lunch or the end of the work day. You and the rest of the NSI should be aware of this, and treat all journalist enquires as urgent matters

● **Give background and insight.** As mentioned, very few journalists are experts in one field. They might even have as much problems as the general public understanding basic statistics and tables. For you, it is good to help the journalist understand as much of the statistics as possible, to help build a news story that also put your NSI in a good light. Take time, give background information and be generally helpful. This also increases the possibility that the journalist will contact you again.

● **Have a good strategy on how to deal with the media.** Even though getting media coverage for statistics in itself should be the main focus for an NSI, it is of course no secret that many media requests are also quite difficult to handle. You should have a clear strategy on who within your organization handles which questions. One general advice could be that statisticians handle regular questions on facts and the easier requests for interviews, heads of division and directors get media training and do radio and TV interviews, while directors and the DG handles criticism (about errors etc.) and questions on the NSI as an institution. The important thing is to let every employee know who handles what before the journalist calls.

5. Does it work? The importance of measuring and evaluating

A lot of communication activities are expensive for an NSI, and it is important that they work and increase the use and understanding of statistics, and the number of users. Therefore, all communications activities should be measured and evaluated to confirm that they achieve communication objectives. Measurement and evaluation should be a consideration throughout a communication activity and should not wait until an activity has concluded. There are a lot of easy ways to do this.

● **Install Google Analytics (GA)** on your website (https://analytics.google.com/analytics/web/#/). This will give you numbers on how many users who have actually seen and read your content. GA is free and is a very good way to see how much and if your web content is actually used.

● **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** should be identified at the start of the activity, not when the final results are in. KPIs demonstrate the impact of the activity on organizational goals and gives a benchmark that allows for easy tracking of improvements and progress. Three types of common communication measures can become KPIs:

- **Activity-based** - if no other measures are available, report what you did. How many newsletters, web pages, seminars etc.

- **Measures of communication channels** - quantitative measures. Number of webpage hits, phone calls, attendees, Twitter retweets/ likes etc.

- **Analytical** - these measures bring quantitative measures together and complement them with qualitative understanding. These are more detailed than those above

A number of questions can be asked to help assess the success of communication objectives, regardless of type of project. These can include:

● Did you reach the right users?

● Did you use the right communications tools and/or channels?

● Did your audience understand your messages?

● Were decisions taken as a result of your messages?

● Did the target audience take action as a result of your messages? Was it the desired action?

● Did you comply with the budget? If not, why?

● What would you do differently next time?

But at the same time, don't let evaluation and costs be more important than creativity and a trying-and-failing spirit. Today, it is more important than ever to try out new approaches to communicating, and some of these might not work as planned the first time.

6. *Communication channels – paper, web, social media and beyond*

All NSIs have a number of real and potential communication channels that can be used to achieve communication goals. It is very worthwhile to see and understand all your channels, and use them as good as possible. To make it easier, we can divide the channels into five:

- Electronic – mainly web
- Print – publications, printed newsletters
- Social media – Twitter, Facebook etc.
- Regular media – newspapers, radio, TV etc.
- Direct contact – meetings, survey data collection, seminars, employees talking about their workplace,

Of these, the media are treated in a separate chapter (see Chapter 4. Media). Here is a quick overview of the other four.

6.1. *The website*

The internet is here to stay, and all statistical agencies should have a website as their main channel for disseminating statistics and communicate with users. There are several ways to build a functional website that are documented elsewhere. Here are just a few tips that all NSIs should take into account when building and structuring content on their site.

- Every page of your website should exist only to answer a user need. Employees of an NSI do not count as users – they will find the information they need no matter how you organize the site.
- Users come to the website of an NSI in search of statistical information. The home page should focus on the presentation of statistics and related services, news releases and publications - not organisational matters, photos of your buildings, vision and mission etc.
- Key parts of your website should always be user tested before the development phase
- Make the most of the statistics and publications you actually have released, and work on what you should have had later.
- All paper publications should also be available through the website
- All parts of the website should be accessible by and usable on a mobile phone
- As much as 75 per cent of all web traffic comes from searches on Google. Optimizing for search engines is both very important and

very difficult. Google's algorithms change all the time, but they tend to prefer pages with clear and concise language from respected web sites.

- Every page on your site is someone's front page. Make sure their user experience makes sense by including links to related parts of your site as well as general navigation on every page.
- Follow trends on web use, and try to make sure your web site is following all relevant standards, technical and otherwise
- Experts need downloadable data to work on. You should have a database accessible through your website, or at least provide statistical data in Excel sheets.
- You should have a release calendar on your website so that users know when to expect new and updated statistics
- Metadata with explanations and definitions of statistics should be included along with the statistics
- You should have an archive for old publications and statistics
- Provide an option for users to make comments and questions to be answer by NSI (interaction between NSI and potential users)

Apps for mobile phones could be useful, but it's very important to ask potential users of the actual need before making one. Also bear in mind that apps need constant development to keep working on different versions of mobile devices. In most cases, it will make more sense to make sure your website works on mobile devices before developing an app.

6.2.
Printed material

A lot of emphasis and work is put into printed publications in statistical institutions. While many institutions have almost stopped printing yearbooks and other publications because of expenses and lack of users, it might still be a good idea to keep printing in African institutions. However, a lot of printed material is made despite insights in real user needs. Consider these advices:

● How much of your total communication costs is put into printing publications? Considering other needs, it should not exceed 20 per cent of the total communication budget

● Have a real discussion on the user needs, preferably with some numbers in hand. How many users want this in print, will as many find it on web, how many used the previous publication etc.?

● The publication should always be accessible through your website as a pdf-document.

● Consider publishing only as pdf on your website, and then print and distribute on demand

● Consider less numbers printed

6.3.
Social media

Social media can be described as interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate creation and sharing of information and ideas. There are several hundred websites, apps and other technology that can be described as a social medium. Social media in one form or another is used by almost everybody with access to a computer or a mobile phone every day.

Statistical agencies should also use these, but social media is best used to engage users, not to disseminate statistics. Social media is particularly good to build your agency's trust and reputation and to build awareness about statistics in general.

There are a lot of social media to choose from for an NSI, and they are all (as of now) free to use. Facebook, Twitter, Vimeo, YouTube, Flickr, RSS and Instagram might be preferred channels for most NSIs, but usage also varies from country to country. Use the channels that are most likely to reach the population you serve.

There is hardly any best practice in how statistical agencies should succeed in social media. Those who have made success with one post, probably don't succeed as much with their next. There is however some first advice to be made:

● All social media channels have their own distinctive character – understand as much as possible about these. Preferably by being an active user yourself

● You should make unique content for the social media channels you use at your NSI. Visualizations, videos and simple graphs work better

● Remember you compete for attention with everybody who publish content in these channels. You have to make content that stands out and is interesting, and you have to build your own identity

● Welcome feedback from users. Answer questions as fast as possible.

● All major social media are using very advanced algorithms that decide what content each user get to see. It pays off to understand as much as possible about these algorithms and make and publish content accordingly

● Success in social media can easily be measured in likes, shares, comments and user reach. It's very easy to monitor how your content is doing. Use this information all the time to see how you are doing, and which changes to make

● You have to be willing to fail with some posts and be allowed to do so by top management. Fear of failure cripples creativity, and creativity is essential to succeed in social media.

You should make a strategy for your social media activity. However, it still makes sense to make account(s) and try out your preferred channels before you settle on how and who you want to be.

6.4.
Direct contact

One of the best ways to communicate is to meet and talk with users of statistics. This can be done in focus groups, meetings, side events and seminars on statistics, statistical training, when doing surveys and on a lot of other arenas. It is impossible to make general advice that works for all of these, but you still have to consider them as vital communications channels.

EXAMPLES ON GOOD PRACTICE FROM AFRICAN COUNTRIES

● **Mozambique** gives importance to the monitoring and using technology. They are using analytics to monitor their website. Further, they focus on open source software and applications in order to ensure sustainability and extensive usage by the people.

● **Mozambique** benefits from google alerts regarding their release calendar. They can have notifications (e.g. 1-2 weeks before) from google calendar.

7. *Corporate communications – building reputation and trust*

As a statistical organization, you have a brand whether you acknowledge it or not. Therefore, it is important to control, own and nurture your brand. Your brand is in essence how the organization is living its values and how it is presented to and perceived by the public. A brand should cover the breadth of the organization, and at least cover these fields:

● Personality—how it interacts with its stakeholders

● Identity—how others recognize it and the image it portrays

● Reputation—how it is perceived and described by others.

Many statistical agencies in Africa struggle with how they are seen and professionally treated within the public sector. It is both important and difficult to gain trust and needed reputation as the main provider of official statistics within the country, or/and as the leading institution within a national statistical program.

There is no easy way to get there, and a lot goes beyond the limits of communication. Statistical laws and functional national statistical systems are more parts of politics than communication as such. But it is at the same time very important to remember that good and targeted corporate communication can help the NSI achieve its goals.

At the same time, it is important to remember that all communication efforts contribute to your corporate communications. Especially stories in traditional media and successful posts on social media will help build your agency's brand. All important stakeholders also use these communication channels.

But corporate communication should also be a part of your communication strategy in itself. Here are some general points of advice on what you could think about, but be aware of huge differences among countries on what is most important.

● Advocacy towards main stakeholders in government and the bureaucracy is a vital issue. How can you be seen and treated as the main provider of official statistics within your country?

 - Identify the main stakeholders and try to make separate (small) strategies on how to reach them. Newsletters from your agency, regular meetings or side events with the DG, attending other government meetings are some ideas

 - Try to drag out the essence of how you want to be seen in society, and formulate this in a vision for your company. Use this in communication activities onwards

 - Collect all important documents on how you are working as a producer of official statistics – international standards, code of practice, national statistics law, glossary etc. – on your website. Take the most important parts and use these in communication activities

 - Make an annual cycle on important activities – which meetings/side events do you need to attend, what are important deadlines for budgets, elections etc.

 - How can you make the best use of the DG and other directors? Which meetings/side events should they attend, who should they talk with etc.

 - Find out who your friends are, and try out different approaches with them.

 - Promote all other communication activities actively towards this group to let them know everything you are doing. Especially activities that help informing the public in general – for instance programs on improving statistical literacy, activities on communicating surveys etc.

 - Make a standard template for presentations that show what is most important with your NSI. This can include your vision, your main fields of statistics, the importance of quality statistics in building democracies etc. This should not be too long, but something everyone in your agency can start their presentations with

● Activities on improving statistical literacy and -understanding in the public

- Special activities directed towards pupils and students in schools and universities might be a good idea to increase understanding and improve awareness about official statistics.

● In-house courses on how to find and use statistics for government employees and journalistsNews media are not only interested in the latest figures on CPI or national accounts. They can also be made interested in corporate matters, like the importance of a new statistical law, your new strategy, literacy programs towards schools etc. To make this work, you will have to be creative.

- More than with new statistics, it is crucial to make a "sales pitch" to get media interested in these stories. Think about what is interesting for a journalist, rather than what is interesting for you. Offer interviews with staff (DG or other high ranking official)

- Another way to get media attention for corporate matters, is to write chronicles for newspapers. These should also have clear angles and preferably be signed by the DG

● Any survey has a substantial element of corporate communication. When planning, conducting and presenting the results from a survey, you should make a communication plan on how to reach respondents, how to make them understand your agenda and the importance of participating, highlight the value of official statistics etc.

- The last few years, the concept of service design has been adapted by more and more government bodies around the world. In its essence, service design is about how to communicate in an understandable and easy way with users throughout a process (for example a survey), and remove as many obstacles as possible on the way. There is a lot of good information and studies on service design available through a google search, for instance on Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_design

● All NSIs should have a contact point where users, respondents, journalists, organizations and members of the public can get in touch with the organization with a minimum of hassle. The worst answer from a corporate communicative point of view, is to not answer at all or not even getting the question. Many NSIs in the world have put an information unit like this within a communication department.

● Although a crisis rarely happens, any strategy on corporate communications should include a plan on how to communicate in a crisis. It is possible to foresee what kind of crises that can potentially strike an NSI up to a certain point (data leakage, major errors in important economic statistics, etc.), but it is more important to make a plan on how to deal with any crisis. Who should be involved in the crisis team, who can "press the crisis button", how often do you meet, who should be the spokesperson, how to involve major stakeholders etc.

● Internal communication is a key element in corporate communications. To be able to communicate your organization's brand in a good way, you have to have the employees on board. They are themselves very important communication channels towards the rest of the society. Good internal communication is also important to build a company culture, to implement organizational changes etc.

EXAMPLES ON GOOD PRACTICE FROM AFRICAN COUNTRIES

● **Niger** organises "Café Statistiques", a periodic event seeking to improve relationship with users. It led to the creation of a group of "Member of parliament (MP) Statistics Friendship group", associated to all decisions related to statistics (and makes these MPs defenders of statistics interest during budget sessions and the voting of laws and texts on statistics within the National Assembly). A memorandum of understanding was signed with the association of traditional chiefs that helps with the implementation of the NSI activities across the country.

● **Africa Statistics Day** is a great opportunity that countries may use to have a side-events-week on communication around statistics: institutions, products, users, etc. Activities may be cultural, intellectual, technical or awards, depending of the availability of funding.

● The strategic outcome of their integrated communications and marketing strategy will be to reposition **Stats SA** as a trusted brand to increase the participation in collection and use of statistics. To increase use of statistics, their aim is to *make stats easier to understand and increase statistical literacy. Data Stories* in particular allow an accessible overview of a statistical release, aimed at being easily readable and designed to be picked up by the media for further use.

8. *Editorial Production*

8.1. Operations – how to build a statistical release or report

Tables with figures either in Excel or in a database can be regarded as the basic and main output from an NSI. However, in order to reach different user groups with statistics, disseminate and make an impact on society, you will have to refine and improve your statistics.

Many people have difficulties understanding big datasheets. Writing articles, presenting graphs and infographics and small tables, is vital to spread your statistics. Video and sound files can also be considered as ways to disseminate. In an increasingly complex and sectorised society, where social, economic, demographic and cultural phenomena interact, readers need to be guided through the numerical jungle: What do the reported numbers really mean? The media, the informed users and the general public – even the experts – need and want explanations, interpretations and comments.

Before you start writing or refining in other ways, you should think about what you want to say and to whom. The concept of key messages can be a good way to structure your thoughts. Key messages are the main points that you want the target audience to hear and remember. They are an important part of the communications strategy—they create meaning and headline the issues to discuss.

There are two steps to construct key messages:

1. Clarify audience objectives—Identify the audiences and what to say to them. What does the organization want the audience to think, feel or do? Key messages should link back to overarching communication objectives.

2. Create messages—Key messages should be clear and written with the target audience in mind. Messages should be written from the audience perspective and in a plain language, without jargon or bureaucratic prose.

8.2 Writing analysis as news articles

Analysis is basically to compare numbers with other numbers and to describe this comparison in words: After having made the numbers comparable, we compare and describe the differences between men and women, different age groups, districts, etc. Or we analyse how one or several indicators are developing over time.

Analysis also forces the statistician to look closer at the concepts, definitions, measurements, sampling, etc. Analysis therefore provides a necessary feedback into the statistical production process and helps raise the quality of statistics, by uncovering errors and deficiencies in the statistics.

News releases are probably the most widespread type of analysis published by NSIs. When writing news releases, there are a few important points to remember:

● KISS: Keep It Short and Simple. Journalists have a deadline and they don't have time to read long and complicated articles. A news release should be between one and two pages.

● Short title – maximum one line

● Use substantial titles: Not "Results from the Labour Force Survey", but: "More women are working"

● Use subheadings

● Include (or give a link to) some basic metadata and links to other relevant material

● Include contact information: telephone/e-mail address

8.3.
Tables

A table is simply a way to organise the presentation of (several) numbers in columns and rows and its main function is to make it easier to compare the numbers. Any presentation of statistics should include tables of some sort. Read more about how to construct user-friendly tables in *User-friendly presentation of statistics (Paris21, 2009)*

8.4.
Graphs and infographics

In addition to tables and texts, statistical information is today increasingly being presented by using various types of graphs, maps and infographics – both in printed publications as well as on the Internet. Graphs compress data (they have high data density) and they are effective means of dissemination of statistical information. Read more about how to construct user-friendly graphs in *User-friendly presentation of statistics (Paris21, 2009)*

All NSIs should have standardized ways of presenting graphs in their dissemination tool box. Perhaps the easiest way for most is to use the tools that come free with Microsoft Excel. There are also plenty of other tools that make graphs that work well on web. How your NSI make graphs should also be a part of your communication policies.

The last years, more and more emphasis has been put on infographics and data visualisation among statistical agencies. There are two main reasons for this – more and more free tools are available to make infographics (https://www.webfx.com/blog/web-design/free-data-visualization-tools/), and social media like Twitter and Facebook like and enhance infographics to a multitude of users. Infographics are also a very good way to show complicated statistical relations quick and easy in an age where people's attention span is shorter than before.

The best practice for infographics changes all the time, and there are plenty of free tools available through an easy google search. It might be a good idea for an NSI to start with some thoughts on:

● Who do we want to make infographics for? New users, young people etc.

● Which channels do we want to use? Social media, own website, paper publications etc.

● What kind of statistics do we want to use as basis?

● How much time do we want to spend?

No matter what program you choose, you have to be willing to do some trying and failing making infographics. It might be best to start with making infographics for social media – where you will get instant feedback from users if it works or not. You should also visit other statistical agencies' web sites, their social media accounts and other providers of statistical infographics to be inspired before you start.

8.5
Video and sound

The use of video and sound is relatively new to NSIs for disseminating statistics.

Video is particularly used in social media, and is a very good way to get attention in competition with other providers of content. Videos meant for social media can be made with a (good quality) smart phone and edited in either free tools found on the internet or (for instance) Adobe products.

mind that apps need constant development to keep working on different versions of mobile devices. In most cases, it will make more sense to make sure your website works on mobile devices before developing an app.

9. *Human resources*

Dedicated staff, preferably with some communication skills, are necessary to provide good communication and dissemination for the entire NSI. However, everything doesn't need to be in place to start working on communication. Here are some advice on where to start, and in which direction you should go:

● As the communication department is responsible for all communication out of the organization, the organizational map should reflect this. The head of the communication department should preferably be a member of the board of directors (or similar decision-making body within your organization)

● The media are the most important user group for any statistical agency. You should have staff that understands how the media works and what they need, for instance a former journalist

● Web developing, structuring and content managing is crucial for a statistical agency. There should be at least one person responsible for this, either within the communication department or in the IT-department
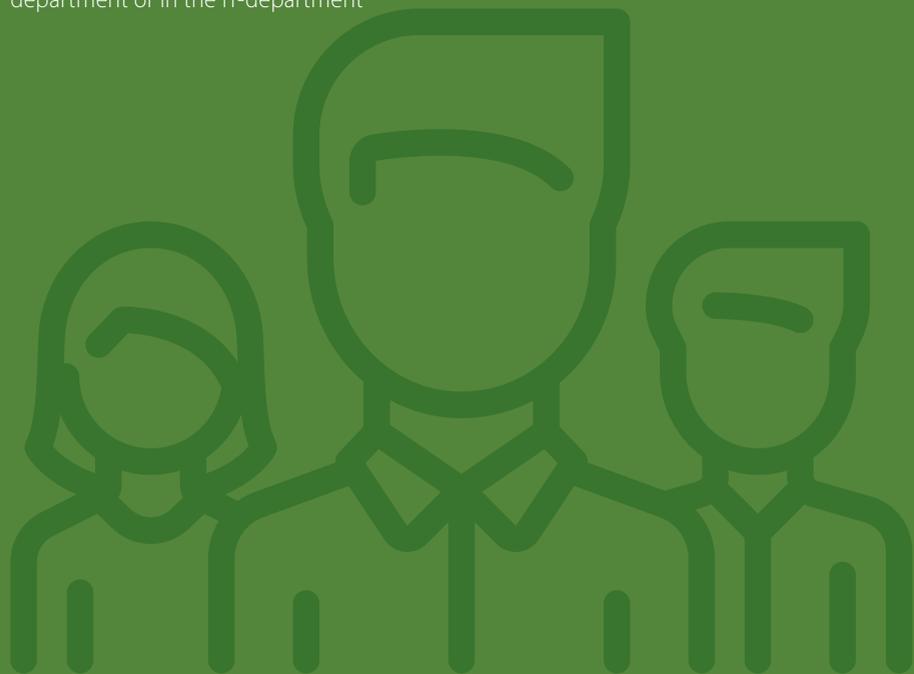
● Young people are more familiar with new trends in communication, for example social media. It might be a good idea to hire junior staff to be responsible for your social media activities.

● Many NSIs find it difficult to keep dedicated communication staff over time, often due to low salaries. One way to keep young staff over time, is to give them responsibilities and more space to work creatively.

● If you are short on communication staff, try to have more doers than thinkers. It's fine to work with strategies and other long-term projects, but most statistical agencies have a lot of communication and dissemination to do right away. Your staff should prioritize that.

● Most communication organizations tend to recruit or develop the following skill sets in-house. Of course, one person can have more than one skill, and several persons can have the same basic skills:

  - Management and leadership

  - Strategy development (e.g., in social media and strategic communications)

  - Basic content creation and production/ dissemination

  - Stakeholder relations management, public relations.

● As a general rule, a professional communications function will employ staff with either

  - **Professional qualifications** (e.g., communications, journalism, marketing, advertising, multimedia / visualization production, channel management or a related field)

  - Qualifications through **relevant experience** (the more experience, the more senior the position).

● As communication becomes more and more specialized, it also makes sense to hire staff for shorter period, for instance to help with communication strategies, make templates for infographics, kickstart social media accounts, etc.

Ideally, the communication unit should be located close to the top management/chief statistician.

Centralizing the overall responsibility for dissemination does not imply that all the dissemination activities are carried out by this unit. It means that this unit has the responsibility for developing a dissemination policy as well as tools and rules for dissemination.

10. *Community building*

Working with communication at a statistical agency, you should always remember there are many out there with the same challenges and possibilities as you. All statistical agencies in Africa and around the rest of the world have either been struggling with the same communication issues as you, or they will in the future. And it's not only about struggling either – a lot of inspiration can be found in seeing how others are doing things. You should always look into how other statistical agencies, government bodies in your own country or private firms have solved their issues, before you set out on your big communication tasks.

10.1. *Building networks*

It is a very good idea to build networks with other communication departments that are on the same level as you. It is also possible to set up smaller groups, for example with one or two neighboring countries.

● Try to set some dates or frequencies where you are going to meet, talk or e-mail with each other

● Focus not only on problems but achievements and best practices too

● Challenge each other to do some major tasks at the same time – setting up a communication strategy, starting to use social media etc.

● Try to get advice from other bodies as well – UN, Eurostat, AfDB, UNECA, European statistical agencies etc.

10.2. *Best international practices, handbooks etc.*

Apart from building networks, remember that a lot has been done already in terms of communication at statistical agencies and similar government bodies around the world. You should dig into this material whenever necessary – take what suits you best and make changes where you need it. A lot of links to handbooks, communication guidelines, best practices, codes of practice etc. can be found at the end of this document. In addition – today you can get good advice on almost everything by simple google searches. Try to search for "communication strategy" for instance.

11. *National peculiarities*

Although a lot in the field of communicating statistics can be treated quite universal, there are of course also a lot of places where your NSI has to find your own way because of the ways thing are in your statistical system or country. A key issue is to take these peculiarities into account, but not let them overshadow everything. The advice in this handbook and all the others that are around, can be used – fully or partially – by every NSI in the world.

Links to relevant literature

● User-friendly presentation of statistics – Paris21 (2009) https://paris21.org/node/455

● Statistical capacity development – Outlook 2019 – Paris21 https://statisticalcapacitymonitor.org/pdf/Statistical%20Capacity%20Development%20Outlook%202019.pdf

● Strategic communication framework for statistical institutions – ECE https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/2019/7_Strategic_commmunication_framework_for_consultation.pdf

● Making data meaningful – UNECE https://unstats.un.org/unsd/EconStatKB/Knowledgebase Article 10350.aspx

● Strategic plan for Statistics South Africa 2019/20 http://www.statssa.gov.za/strategy_plan/strategy_plan_2015.pdf

● A quality framework for the African statistical system – PAS

● SHaSA 2

● Personas, why and how you should make them https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/personas-why-and-how-you-should-use-them

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