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7th Pacific Statistics Methods Board Meeting (PSMB) Summary Report and Outcomes

18 May 2021

**Virtual meeting hosted by SPC
Noumea, New Caledonia**

Prepared by the
Statistics for Development Division (SDD) of the
Pacific Community (SPC)

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List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics	PICTs	Pacific Island countries and territories
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	PSMB	Pacific Statistics Methods Board
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey	PSSC	Pacific Statistics Standing Committee
HOPS	Heads of Pacific Planning and Statistics	SDD	Statistics for Development Division (SPC)
NSO	National Statistics Office	SIAP Pacific	Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific
NSDS	National Strategy for the Development of Statistics	SPC	Pacific Community
PACSTAT	Statistical Innovation and Capacity Building in the Pacific Islands	TYPSS	Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy

The Pacific Statistics Methods Board (PSMB) met on 18 May 2021. It was a virtual meeting hosted by SPC, Noumea, and was chaired by Vince Galvin. The meeting was held using Zoom. This was the first PSMB meeting for 2021.

Participants	Board members: Melanesia – Kemueli Naiqama, Fiji Australian Bureau of Statistics – Bruce Fraser Statistics New Zealand – Vince Galvin (Chair) UN agencies – James Kaphuka (UNICEF) Observers: Pacific Community (SPC) – Epeli Waqavonovono, David Abbott, Michael Sharp Statistics New Zealand – Ofa Ketu'u World Bank – Kristen Himelein
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Summary of proceedings

Opening

1. The Chair welcomed everyone. He noted that no PICT representatives had joined the meeting as yet, and without them there was no quorum. However, as the meeting was a short one (1.5 hours) intended to consider updates and provide advice rather than make significant decisions, he believed it could proceed. He supported Dr Ketu'u's comments on the critical importance of Pacific NSO participation in PSMB.
2. In response to a question on efforts to encourage attendance, the SDD Director, Epeli Waqavonovono, confirmed he had contacted the Government Statisticians for Fiji, Nauru and Tonga, who said they planned to attend. He was not able to reach all of the Government Statisticians.

Agenda item 1: PACSTAT: First PSMB Commissioned Work, and upcoming calls for proposals for PSMB Commissioned Work and/or Innovative Experiments

3. In relation to PSMB Commissioned Work 1, Michael Sharp said the fourth meeting of PSMB in October 2019 agreed that 'priorities for innovative research under the regional project will include data anonymisation to allow sharing of datasets'.
4. As a start to this initiative, the project team has drafted terms of reference (TOR) for a consultancy to undertake a 'Methodological review for anonymising census and survey microdata in the context of small island developing states'.
5. The draft TOR propose two outputs:

Report 1: Improving access to and use of Pacific development microdata

This report will be an information reference for Pacific statistics decision-makers and will support decision-making and policy on microdata access and use. It will focus on dissemination of HIES microdata, which is the most relevant dataset.

The report will be accompanied by a two-page policy brief (for a non-technical audience) that presents the risks, opportunities and costs of increasing the use of microdata.

Report 2: A practical guide for anonymising census and survey microdata

This report will provide a technical resource for NSOs on microdata anonymisation practices. The guide will be used in training NSOs.

6. The project team invited PSMB to provide feedback on the TOR.
7. The next call for PACSTAT proposals will be made a month before PSMB's meeting in October, with all proposals to be vetted according to the protocol established.

Discussion

8. Kristen Himelein said the TOR required expertise in two different areas. The number of technical experts who understand anonymisation is relatively small. The project required people who can write code. She recommended first getting the technical document done and then getting it translated into code.
9. Bruce Fraser said the TOR should provide more guidance on overall strategy and more clarity on (1) the technical issues involved in anonymisation, and (2) issues relating to data use.

The TOR point the way to a broader range of use of data. Public use of microdata may require putting data into categories. There are questions around who you provide access to, and how you protect against hacking.

A 10-year strategy should be considered.

In terms of the person/capability required to undertake the consultancy, it is essential that the consultant can communicate well with people and is able to develop an understanding of the blockers to enabling access to microdata.

10. The Chair asked about expectations for likely users of the microdata and the user context. He asked whether the project was investing in very public use and suggested a stocktake of the work required would be useful.

In considering dissemination of microdata, Stats NZ had to assess community impact, which included consultation with Maori users.

11. Michael Sharp replied that the Pacific has a large amount of data that is not being used. Requests to NSOs for data, including from SPC, often do not receive a response. The Pacific Data Hub has anonymisation processes in place, terms of use, etc., but these procedures are not resulting in an increase in the use of microdata.

Most Government Statisticians agree with the benefits of sharing data but may not be supported by their country legislation. Kiribati is taking a more liberal approach to disseminating microdata, although it does not have an NSDS and some of its legislation dates back to the 1960s.

The factors inhibiting access to Pacific microdata are not easy to define — Is individual risk of disclosure a problem? Do countries want to hold on to their data? Do they feel they are simply providing data to PhD students?

12. Kristen Himelein said the TOR includes a focus on disclosure risk and what is needed to make risk acceptable. However, data use and access are more nebulous problems, which the World Bank has dealt with for 30 years. She suggested an initial diagnostic could be useful.

The project could include two parts:

- (1) 'Constraints to use of microdata in Pacific Island countries'
- (2) 'Anonymisation for small island states in the Pacific'

The project financing would allow both parts to be done.

(The Chair welcomed Kemueli Naiqama, Fiji, to the meeting.)

13. Ofa Ketu'u said NSO concerns about releasing data should not be underestimated. There is a need to engage in ongoing dialogue with Government Statisticians and to answer their questions.
14. Kemueli Naiqama agreed, saying Government Statisticians need clarity on what data is being collected and what it is used for – including whether it is for global or regional purposes.
15. The Chair summarised the issues raised in the discussion and emphasised the need to ensure NSOs had confidence in the processes for anonymisation. He offered to provide participants with information on Stats NZ's criteria for access to data.
16. Michael Sharp thanked the meeting for the useful feedback and asked if PSMB could agree on issuing a contract for Report 1.
17. The Chair noted the meeting did not have a quorum.
18. Kristen Himelein said that from the World Bank's perspective, PSMB only makes recommendations on the project. SPC makes decisions based on the recommendations.

Agenda item 2: Updates

TYPPS review

19. Epeli Waqavonovono met with the review consultant, who has so far interviewed 12 of 15 Government Statisticians. The consultant provided feedback on the information received to date:
 - There is considerable variation in the needs of different PICTs and concern about how to address these needs.
 - NSOs appreciate the current mode of providing practical, hands-on training and find it effective.
 - There is wide agreement that funding is a concern and is affecting collections.
 - There is a general view that there should be emphasis on the use of 'big data'.
 - Statistical literacy is important to ensure that users value statistics and cooperate with surveys.
20. Some meeting participants, who had been interviewed as part of the review, said the consultant did not seem well briefed and had little knowledge of PSMB. David Abbott said SPC had given the consultant a thorough briefing and relevant documents. The feedback from the consultant was positive so far and a report was expected soon.

World Bank initiatives

21. Kristen Himelein provided two updates:
 - **Mobile phone surveys** – Two rounds in Papua New Guinea have been completed and the data is available.
The second round for Solomons Islands is still in progress.
Two new countries are coming online – Fiji and Tonga. Fiji already has data to provide a basis for pre- and post-measures of the effects of COVID-19.
The Tonga survey is in the early stages of development (discussion and planning with the Tonga Department of Statistics). It is proposed that the survey will be conducted in partnership with the Asian Development Bank.
 - **Pacific Observatory** – Non-traditional data for Papua New Guinea and Pacific Island countries
The initiative will explore and develop new information sources to mitigate the impact of data gaps in official statistics. It has four components:

1. Continuation and expansion of high frequency mobile phone surveys.
 2. Alternative data sources for economic statistics.
 3. Alternative data for sector statistics.
 4. Research and documentation.
22. The World Bank is still in discussion with DFAT on funding for the observatory.
- PSMB will have an advisory role and will provide insight on the work plan. The World Bank does not plan to run the observatory forever, but rather needs an organisation (e.g. a university) to come onboard and continue it. Suggestions on possible local actors were welcome.
23. The Chair said New Zealand and Australian universities both need potential partners and may well be interested.

New Zealand realm countries

24. David Abbott said SDD is in the process of signing a contract with a consultant to write up the results of the Cooks Islands rapid assessment survey. Surveys in Tokelau and Niue are being done by Stats NZ. The surveys are not structured in the same way, but there is some comparability.
25. Ofa Ketuu thanked SPC for providing Stats NZ with support for the Tokelau census in November.

PSMB TOR and review

26. The Chair has drafted some thoughts on the PSMB review and will circulate these to members soon, noting the TYPPS review was not likely to provide much input for PSMB.

Agenda item 3: Issues for PSMB's October meeting

27. The following issues were noted:
- SDD to prepare one page of potential items for PSMB to discuss (EW)
 - Update on the PSMB review (VG)
 - Pacific Observatory (KH)
 - Results of poverty studies (though these may not yet be validated) (KH)
28. Epeli Waqavonovono noted that Government Statisticians were asking for guidance from PSMB on high-frequency phone monitoring surveys. They were concerned that the survey findings differed from those for HIES.
29. The Chair asked Epeli to discuss the issue with VG and KH. Epeli will provide them with further information.

Next meeting of PSMB

30. The next PSMB meeting is planned for October 2021. SDD will notify members of the dates and agenda closer to the time.

Note: Update on PSMB Subcommittee on use of administrative data in PICTs

31. In collaboration with partners, SDD has recently published the following two papers on the use of population registers:
- <https://sdd.spc.int/news/2021/05/05/knowledge-series1-population-registers-definitions-and-conceptual-framework>
 - <http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/bq5fn>

Pacific Statistics Methods Board Meeting (PSMB)

18 May 2021

Meeting Outcomes

1. PSMB noted the feedback provided on the draft TOR for the first project commissioned under PACSTAT, 'Methodological review for anonymising census and survey microdata in the context of small island developing states', and recommended that after consideration of the feedback, SPC should make a decision on issuing a contract for Report 1.
2. PSMB noted that the next call for PACSTAT proposals will be made a month before its meeting in October 2021.
3. PSMB noted updates on:
 - the TYPPS review, which is currently underway, and some of the feedback received to date;
 - progress on the second round of mobile phone surveys in Papua New Guinea (completed) and Solomon Islands (close to completion). Surveys will also be conducted in Fiji and Tonga;
 - the Pacific Observatory, which will focus on new information sources to mitigate the impact of data gaps in official statistics for Papua New Guinea and other Pacific Island countries;
 - rapid assessment surveys in New Zealand realm countries (Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau);
 - the PSMB review – the Chair will shortly circulate thoughts on the review to members.
4. PSMB raised issues for discussion at its meeting in October 2021. SDD will prepare one page of potential items for discussion. Issues include:
 - PSMB review;
 - Pacific Observatory;
 - results of poverty studies (though these may not yet be validated);
 - guidance for Government Statisticians on high-frequency phone monitoring surveys, noting concerns that the findings of these surveys differ from those for HIES.
5. PSMB noted its next meeting will be in October 2021. SDD will provide the dates and agenda closer to the time.