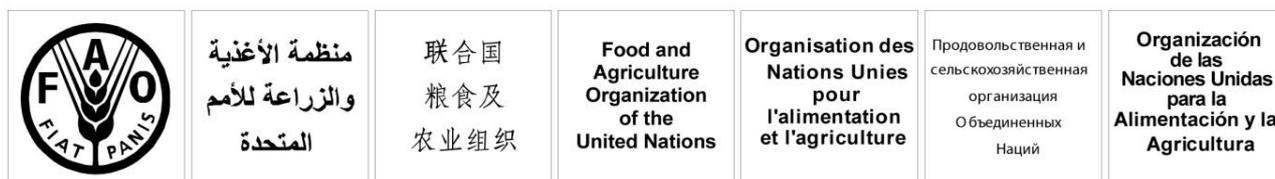


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In-depth Country Assessments - Bhutan experience

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Abstract

Bhutan has a relatively decentralized statistical system with the National Statistical Bureau as its apex body. In the absence of a legal framework for regulation of the statistical system, the executive orders of the Cabinet serve purpose. The statistical programmes are administrated directly under the authority of respective ministries and agencies.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forests generates agriculture statistics through surveys, census and administrative records. The major issues/challenges with agricultural statistical system are lack of funding; professionals; inadequate and poor quality statistics. The in-depth country assessment report is at its final stage for developing strategic plan for agriculture and rural statistics.

1. Bhutan Statistical System

Bhutan has a relatively decentralized statistical system. The National Statistical Bureau (NSB) with an autonomy status stands as the apex body for country's statistical development and statistics dissemination. Administratively, the NSB is directly under the office of the Prime Minister. The legal and institutional authority of NSB is provided through executive orders and promulgations issued by the Cabinet. The statistical programmes are administrated and operated under the authority of various government ministries and agencies. The statistical units within ministries and agencies collect and compile data through surveys, administrative records, and periodic reports obtained from enterprises, institutions, households and others.

The NSB provides technical advice, particularly in the area of sampling and data analysis, to line agencies that conduct surveys of national coverage. All agencies conducting surveys have to route through and get clearance from NSB on survey methodology and questionnaire design. This allows for sharing of sampling frame by NSB as well as correcting of any errors. Any official statistical publications in relation to surveys have to be endorsed by NSB.

2. RNR Statistics (Agriculture statistics)

The NSB does not have a separate unit established for the compilation of the Renewable Natural Resources (RNR) statistics. The RNR-statistics refers to the statistics on agriculture, livestock, forestry, fishery, and all other statistics related to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MoAF). The responsibility for production of RNR-statistics is vested with the MoAF. However, there is a designated focal person identified at NSB to liaise with the MoAF for RNR-statistics. Mostly, the RNR-statistics are being collected by NSB from the ministry for national accounts and Statistical Yearbook publications.

The MoAF, coordinated by Policy and Planning Division (PPD) conducts RNR Census every 10 years. The first was carried out in 2000 and the second in 2009 covering agriculture, livestock and forestry activities. Both the censuses were fully funded by DANIDA. The next census is planned to be conducted in 2018 and funds yet to be explored.

Harvested area and crop production data are captured annually through sample surveys conducted by the Department of Agriculture (DoA). Livestock data, including fisheries, are collected through the livestock census undertaken annually by the Department of Livestock (DoL). The forestry data is compiled by the Department of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS) annually from an administrative reporting system. The DoFPS has an automated database system that records data from field offices to the department headquarters. Data on market and trade is maintained by Department of Agricultural Marketing and Cooperatives (DAMC) through administrative records.

The PPD compile and analyze the data produced by various agencies within the ministry as well as the other ministries and publish the *Bhutan RNR Statistics annually*. The statistical data captured through surveys and censuses are available at *geog* (sub-districts), *dzongkhag* (districts) and national levels while most of the compiled administrative and secondary data are available at *dzongkhag* and national levels. The NSB does not directly collect agricultural data but calculates RNR gross domestic product (GDP) and growth using the statistical data submitted by the MoAF.

3. Key Issues and challenges in agriculture statistics

Some of the major issues and challenges in agriculture statistics can be viewed from different perspectives such as from the eyes of producers and users. The producers mainly face the

challenges of poor coordination, lack of professionals and funding while the users face the difficulties of inadequacy, poor quality and irregular release of data.

Poor coordination

Multiple agencies both within and outside the MoAF are involved in generating RNR-statistics. For instance, the major agencies outside authority of the MoAF are the Department of Revenue and Customs (DRC) under the Ministry of Finance (MoF) involved in recording of the trade statistics; the Natural Resources Development Corporation Limited (NRDCL) involved in recording of the forestry related statistics; the Food Corporation of Bhutan Limited (FCBL) involved in recording the food related statistics especially the imports, exports and food reserves. There are also numerous agencies within the MoAF responsible for production of RNR statistics. In the absence of the proper coordination mechanism and legal bindings, these agencies especially outside of MoAF work on individual basis and produce statistics based on own requirements leading to weak and inconsistent data. The MoAF do not have authority to fix responsibility of a proper RNR data generation to the agencies outside of the MoAF and this becomes difficult to generate timely and more accurate data. However, the NSB is finalising the National Statistics Act (NSA) which is expected to improve the system over times.

Inadequate and poor quality

The general experiences are there are no adequate data available and the existing data are of poor quality. The problems are attributed by lack of professional and full time statisticians, and adequate funds. The existing staff involved in generation and handling the RNR statistics are from non-statistics background and also have multiple mandates to be fulfilled back in their offices. At times, they spent majority of their time doing non-statistical activities. Further, in the absence of adequate government funding training of staff is a challenge and certain statistical activities cannot be carried out as deemed necessary. Thus, the “RNR Statistical Framework” is expected to serve the purpose of obtaining a modestly operational minimum set of RNR statistics.

Irregular release of data

Owing to lack of adequate funding support timely release of data is greatly hindered. In the absence of regular funding support we have to depend on funding supports of the donors and development partners. If no supports are available, we have to wait for such favourable time. At times, the collected field data takes too long to release for want of funds and experts and become irrelevant.

Lack of professional manpower

The RNR statistical works are coordinated by the RNR statistical coordination section (RNR-SCS) housed in PPD. The RNR-SCS itself does not have qualified statisticians except some have availed short trainings and hands on experiences at job. The RNR-SCS assists line departments and agencies in designing and analysis of their statistical surveys.

Most of the field data collections are done by field extension officials supervised by district RNR sector heads under the overall coordination of respective subject matter departments (agriculture, livestock and forestry). The extension officials who serve as enumerators for almost all RNR data collection activities do not have statistical backgrounds and skills. At times, we also employ temporary enumerators for surveys when we secure some funds from donors. The enumerators with very short trainings given just before the surveys tend to lack required skills and make

mistakes. In the absence of an established system, the coordinators of such surveys have to depend on NSB for expertise supports when required. At times it becomes difficult for the NSB to provide timely supports. Such scenarios greatly hinder effective statistical system.

Lack of adequate funding

In the absence of strong statistical law and adequate funds with the government, it would remain difficult for the government to allocate enough funds for the statistical activities. For a developing country like Bhutan, it will take some time to have enough resources of its own. In the absence of adequate resources, it will not be in a position to build professionals, build effective statistical system and carry out the required statistical activities. So, the upcoming NSA of the NSB and global and regional strategies are the near hope for an effective statistical system in the long run.

4. The design of in-depth Country Assessment Process

The RNR statistics being faced with several issues and challenges have started with tuning with the global and regional action plan towards developing its national plan. As a step towards this, the in-depth country assessment (IdCA) process in Bhutan started since 2012. The process is being carried out by MoAF in collaboration with the ADB and the FAO-RAP Bangkok.

IdCA Process with ADB, Manila

A 3-day national stakeholder's workshop of RNR statistics titled "*In-country Stakeholders Workshop on Country Action Plan for Improving RNR Statistics*" was held in September 2012. The workshop was coordinated by the PPD with technical and financial support from Asian Development Bank (ADB) based in the Philippines. The workshop was attended by the representatives from all Information Management Sections (IMS) within the MoAF; the representatives from NSB and Gross National Happiness Commission. The workshop recommended the Country Action Plan (CAP) for improving the RNR Statistics with following expected key outputs:

1. Strengthened coordination among RNR statistics stakeholders
2. Upgraded skills of the staff involved in the compilation of RNR statistics.
3. Increase in staff and ICT infrastructure to collect, process and disseminate RNR statistics.
4. National statistics law enacted and national legal framework established.
5. Enhanced data collection and analytical methods for RNR statistics.
6. Dissemination standards established and implemented.

The CAP is expected to contain comprehensive information on status of the agricultural statistics and further needs, which can be used as a country proposal for both internal and external interventions.

The ADB has also generously extended a grant of US\$ 26,000 to MoAF specifically for carrying out the following activities in 2013-2014 and a Letter of Agreement (LoA) to that effect was signed in August 2013.

- a. Finalization of Country Action Plan for improving agricultural statistics;
- b. Methodological Research
- c. Dissemination of the Results of the Methodological Research
- d. Advocacy for the Country Action Plan

The MoAF has started the execution of the first activity of the LoA i.e conducted the stakeholders meeting on revision of the RNR Statistics Framework (RSF) 2012 in October 2013. The revised RSF is in its finalization stage for further implementation.

IdCA process with FAO RAP, Bangkok

On the other hand, the FAO-RAP Bangkok has carried out the IdCA process in November 2013. The FAO has fielded an international consultant and national consultant for duration of two weeks. The assessment process involved a half day stakeholder meeting mainly to educate the stakeholders on the Regional Action Plan vis-a-vis the action plan of the global strategy. Followed by the meeting, the consultants and the team from PPD met with relevant individuals in different agencies concerned with generation of RNR Statistics both within and outside the RNR sector to complete the questionnaire developed by FAO-RAP in respect to production and utilization status of agricultural and rural statistics in the country. The FAO RAP has recently forward the Draft IdCA report to MoAF for the comments of the stakeholders. The MoAF has further circulated the report amongst all the stakeholders for their comments. The FAO RAP has tentatively indicated the presentation of the report to the stakeholders in March 2014.

5. Expectations from Global Strategy

As Bhutan has a very tender statistical system with several limitations, it will have to bank on the continuous supports enshrined in the global strategy. Moreover, Bhutan is undergoing a fast transition period and trying to build its statistical system like many of its other systems; it might have to depend on other dimensions of supports which are not even foreseen today. Some of the major expectations from the global strategy are supports in:

1. Resource mobilisation plans & strategy building
2. Country action planning
3. Technical assistance wherever possible
4. Training of its man power
5. Research on its statistical activities and others.

However, in order to prevent making wrong investments of its limited resources and to orient our system in right direction, we look forward for immediate supports towards formation and use of technical standards and guidelines for data collection.

6. Key areas of capacity building

As our agriculture statistics system is not matured and has several limitations and challenges, we definitely need to do a lot in its capacity development. The key areas of capacity developments could be:

1. Statistical organizational arrangement (with dedicated division/section/units)
2. Building human resource capacity (training and recruitment)
3. Necessary facilities for effective data collection and processing.(IT infrastructures and other relevant equipments)

The organizational arrangements to certain extent are expected to be solved by the upcoming NSA and the revised RSF. However, some successful organizational set up practices elsewhere could be adopted if suitable for Bhutan situation. The foremost necessity is to strengthen the human resources by ways of training the existing staff handling the RNR statistics and recruitment of professionals available in the market. In order to increase the productivity and efficiency of the RNR statistics, it is also necessary to put in place the required ICT infrastructure and other facilities necessary for processing and disseminating RNR statistics.

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