



Pacific
Community
Communauté
du Pacifique

SPC Headquarters

95 Promenade Roger Laroque
BP D5, 98848 Noumea Cedex
New Caledonia

Email: spc@spc.int
Phone: +687 26 20 00
Fax: +687 26 38 18

Siège de la CPS

95 Promenade Roger Laroque
BP D5, 98848 Nouméa Cedex
Nouvelle-Calédonie

Email : spc@spc.int
Tel : +687 26 20 00
Fax : +687 26 38 18

3rd Pacific Statistics Standing Committee (PSSC) Meeting
Virtual meeting hosted by SPC, Noumea, 25 November 2020

Summary Report and Outcomes

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

January 2021

Contents

List of abbreviations.....	3
Summary of proceedings	4
Welcome	4
Agenda item 1.1: Action on recommendations of the 2019 PSSC Meeting	4
Agenda item 1.2: Overview of TYPSS progress and review	4
Agenda item 2: Report on the 2019 implementation of SDD’s Business Plan (2018–2020) and priorities for 2021	5
Agenda item 3: Report from the Chair of the Pacific Statistics Methods Board (PSMB).....	6
Agenda item 4: MFAT update / Pacific tourism statistics strategy	7
Agenda item 5: Update from Statistics NZ on the Pacific Statistics Support Programme.....	8
Agenda item 6: Update from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)	9
Agenda item 7: Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre (PFTAC) update.....	9
Agenda item 8: Update on the University of the South Pacific’s Official Statistics Programme	10
Agenda item 8: Update from NSOs on significant issues, challenges and developments in 2020 (Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, Tokelau, Tonga and Vanuatu).....	11
Agenda item 9: Update on topics for the 2021 HOPS meeting and future focus.....	14
Closing.....	15
Annex 1: 3rd Pacific Statistics Standing Committee (PSSC) – Meeting outcomes.....	16
Annex 2: PSSC3 List of participants.....	16

List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ADB	Asian Development Bank
CAPI	Computer-assisted personal interviewing (also CATI – telephone; CAWI – web)
CRGA	Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (SPC)
CRVS	Civil registration and vital statistics
DDPG	Donor and Development Partners Group
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
FEMM	Forum Economic Ministers Meeting
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HOPS	Heads of Planning and Statistics
IDA	International Development Association
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMTS	International Merchandise Trade Statistics
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
NMDI	National Minimum Development Indicators
NSDS	National Strategies for the Development of Statistics
NSO	National Statistics Office
NSS	national statistics system
PACSTAT	Statistical Innovation and Capacity Building in Pacific Islands (IDA project)
PDH	Pacific Data Hub
PFTAC	Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre
PICTs	Pacific Island countries and territories
PSD	Improving Access to Pacific Statistics and Data (MFAT Project)
PSMB	Pacific Statistics Methods Board
PSSC	Pacific Statistics Standing Committee
RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
SDD	Statistics for Development Division (SPC)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SPC	Pacific Community
TYPSS	Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VNR	Voluntary national review

The Third Pacific Statistics Standing Committee (PSSC) meeting (25 November 2020) was chaired by Mr Ipia Gadabu, Nauru Government Statistician, with Dr Viliami Fifita, Tonga Government Statistician, as Deputy Chair. It was a virtual meeting (Zoom) hosted by SPC, Noumea. The meeting outcomes are in Annex 1. Participants are listed in Annex 2.

Summary of proceedings

All papers and presentations referred to in this report are available online:
<https://sdd.spc.int/events/2020/11/3rd-PSSC-meeting>

Welcome

1. The Director of SPC's Statistics for Development Division (SDD), Epeli Waqavonovono, welcomed delegates and acknowledged the support and advocacy of Australia, New Zealand and the World Bank for the Pacific statistics system, and the collaboration of ABS, PFTAC, Stats NZ, and UN agencies. He urged PSSC to think strategically about the issues to be put forward to next year's meetings of Pacific Heads of Statistics and Planning (HOPS 6) and FEMM.
2. Dr Fifita (Tonga) was asked to act as Chair until the PSSC Chair (Nauru), who was delayed by technical issues, could join the meeting.

Agenda item 1.1: Action on recommendations of the 2019 PSSC Meeting

3. The SDD Director noted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SDD's ability to provide its usual form and level of support and training in 2020. Nevertheless, SDD had successfully delivered most of its support online, including:
 - implementation of the recommended regionally standardised HIES data collection methodology in PICTs, initially by Kiribati, Vanuatu and RMI. Seven-day recall and use of CAPI have resulted in lower costs, improved field monitoring, and higher data quality;
 - further work on standardised guidelines for poverty measurement;
 - provision of online training for NSOs (e.g. dotStat) and support for updating their websites;
 - continued development of the Pacific Data Hub (PDH), including the Microdata Library;
 - implementation of a project to increase the use of administrative data;
 - discussions on potential funding (through a USAID governance project) for gender and rights statisticians to be based in SDD.
4. Preparation of a paper on the proposed Pacific Statistical Collections Financing Facility was delayed by the impact of the pandemic on partners' workplans and financing.
5. The review of the Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy (TYPSS) was also delayed. (DFAT had indicated the review would commence before Christmas.) It was hoped the report would be available for the next HOPS meeting, which was moved from November 2020 to April 2021, largely due to the delay in the TYPSS review.

Discussion

6. Participants were concerned at the lack of action on the TYPSS review and requested that a draft of the terms of reference (TOR) for the review be shared with partners to allow an opportunity for feedback (e.g. on who will be consulted) before they are finalised.
7. SDD has been waiting for DFAT to share a draft of the TOR. The review process has been disrupted by the effects of the pandemic for key DFAT staff and work programming.

Agenda item 1.2: Overview of TYPSS progress and review

8. The SDD Director presented an overview of achievements under TYPSS (2010–2020):
 - Between 2010 and 2020, all 22 PICTs conducted a population census, 19 PICTs conducted a

HIES and six PICTs conducted DHS or MICS. However, only five PICTs carried out a labour force survey.

- Seven of 15 PICTs are currently implementing their National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS), six are at various stages of implementing or developing a strategy, and Samoa is into its second NSDS process. Countries that have implemented an NSDS are strong advocates of its benefits for their national statistics system (NSS).
- Civil registration systems in the region have improved, e.g. an increasing number of PICTs have established a national CRVS coordination mechanism, and a number are providing vital statistics reports to UNESCAP. However, more progress is needed. The Brisbane Accord Group (BAG) is working with countries to strengthen their CRVS systems.
- Most PICTs have improved their capacity to produce international merchandise trade statistics and economic statistics but are not yet doing so at the recommended frequency.
- Ten PICTs have presented Voluntary National Review reports (Samoa twice) under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the reports showing that countries share similar difficulties in relation to climate change and natural disasters, inadequate water and sanitation, violence against women and girls, non-communicable disease, and unemployment – especially for youth.
- PICTs are now reporting on 131 Pacific Roadmap indicators (one was dropped from the global and regional lists). However, there is limited data available for some goals. In addition to its overall support for progress reporting, SDD is assisting:
 - country capacity to report against SDG 2 (Zero hunger) through testing improved methodologies for measurement of food consumption in household surveys, and
 - as part of BAG, the use of administrative data to report against SDG 3 (Good health and well-being).

9. The outcome of the TYPSS review, when completed, will inform the development of the next regional strategy.

Agenda item 2: Report on the 2019 implementation of SDD's Business Plan (2018–2020) and priorities for 2021

10. David Abbott, Manager, Data Analysis and Dissemination, SDD, outlined work in 2020 (see presentation), highlighting:

- a. continued support for the region's SDG reporting, including maintaining and updating the SDG dataset, dashboard and progress wheels, contributing to regional and global reports, and supporting the VNR process for the Federated States of Micronesia and Solomon Islands;
- b. progress on the PDH, including expansion of the indicators and datasets available, migration of the revised NMDI database into the PDH, and improved visualisation of data. Countries were encouraged to access the PDH to view their data and microdata (<http://microdata.pacificdata.org>);
- c. under the PSD MFAT project, provision of support for upgrading national websites, including linking them to the PDH and dotStat indicator database platforms to integrate data flows, and related capacity building;
- d. migration of 13 sites to the new version of PopGIS (PopGIS3) and generation of high-resolution population grids for 11 countries;
- e. remote provision of technical support on trade statistics to countries during the year – 16 countries now have IMTS datasets available in the dotStat database;
- f. analysis of COVID impacts on trade and other economic trends for selected PICTs (impacts on tourism trends will be released before the end of the year). Countries were encouraged to use administrative data as a source of information on COVID impacts.
- g. with BAG, completion of regional guidelines on IT for civil registration and vital statistics, and drafting of CRVS country profiles for 22 PICTs;

- h. delivery of webinars and technical papers under Phase 1 of the project 'Utilisation of registers and administrative data in census programmes for Pacific Island countries', which SDD is implementing. Phase 2 will comprise in-depth technical assistance for countries that want to take the work further;
 - i. the appointment of Gloria Mathenge (SDD's CRVS Advisor) as Chair of the UN's Global CRVS Group;
 - j. completion of population projections and demographic analysis for all PICTs, and projections uploaded to PDH/dotStat;
 - k. support for development of surveys and processes for monitoring COVID impacts with the World Bank, UN agencies and Statistics NZ, including high-frequency phone monitoring surveys (HFPM).
11. The presentation included provisional workplans in each of these areas for 2021, noting that the plans depend on the availability of resources and status of COVID restrictions on travel.
12. Michael Sharp, Economic Statistician and Microdata Specialist, SDD, described the work of the census and survey technical support team in 2020. Achievements included:
- a. successful piloting of a new approach to collecting labour market data through census using a module developed in collaboration with ILO. The module aligns with the new HIES labour module and can be used to report on a number of headline labour force indicators.
 - b. continued implementation of the Food Systems project, which is funded by ACIAR through the University of Wollongong. In collaboration with FAO and the University of Wollongong, the Pacific Nutrient Database was developed for use in food security analysis and estimation of indicators for SDG 1.1.1 and 2.1.1. The Pacific Food Trade Database, also developed under the project, is showing useful information on trends over time. The database will become a regional public good available on PDH.
 - c. using an innovative multi-function dashboard to provide virtual assistance for the Kiribati and Vanuatu censuses. The system enables feedback to be provided in real time and was developed with UNFPA and funding from MFAT;
 - d. coordinating with FAO and the World Bank on processing HIES data to ensure the same consumption distribution is used for SDG 1.1.1 and 2.1.1;
 - e. publishing guidelines for harmonisation of census and survey microdata, and producing standardised labour market indicators for 13 PICTs;
 - f. supporting ongoing development of the PDH – Microdata Library, and advocating sharing and use of PICT microdata, including through increasing confidence in anonymisation processes.
13. In 2021, the team will work with partners, including FAO, UNICEF and UNFPA, to support an intensive schedule of census and surveys in PICTs (9 censuses, 8 HIES, 6 MICS, 6 LFS, and one each on disability and agriculture) and, given the uncertainty around being able to provide face-to-face technical assistance, will develop further online training resources. The team will also continue project work, including research under the new five-year PACSTAT project (Statistical Innovation and Capacity Building in Pacific Islands), which is funded by IDA. PACSTAT's aim is 'to improve the quality of welfare data collection and access to comparable welfare data in PICTs'.

Agenda item 3: Report from the Chair of the Pacific Statistics Methods Board (PSMB)

14. The PSMB Chair, Vince Galvin (Chief Methodologist, Stats NZ), presented a report of the Board's activities in 2020, including:
- a. PSMB's role in PACSTAT: The project offers opportunities for the Pacific to explore its own statistical issues. PSMB will be able to commission research and assess and select research proposals based on PICTs' priorities.
 - b. HFPM surveys: Globally, countries are using rapid assessment surveys to enable governments

and agencies to target programmes addressing COVID impacts. PSMB endorsed plans to proceed with the surveys in several PICTs to provide information for decision-makers, but recognised methodological issues including sample bias (as highlighted by the World Bank following surveys in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands) and the importance of working with NSOs in implementing the surveys.

- c. Monetary Poverty Guidelines: In July 2020, PSMB agreed to the interim adoption of revised guidelines for monetary poverty analysis, which were developed with the World Bank and are being tested in some PICTs. The guidelines are in line with international practice and will enable more standardised measurement across countries. Applying the new methods will, however, disrupt trends in poverty rates.
- d. PSMB has also discussed measurement of non-monetary poverty, including the consensual approach based on relative deprivation.
- e. Labour Market Module for inclusion in housing and population census: PSMB endorsed the new module (see 12 a.) for implementation in PICTs following successful testing in the 2020 Kiribati census pilot.
- f. Stocktake of software used in PICTs: PSMB endorsed a survey of the range of software currently used in the region (the issue has frequently been brought to PSMB's attention). New initiatives often come with new software, which strains the capacity of NSOs and technical assistance providers, and also affects data sharing. The results of the survey, which will be carried out by SDD, will be discussed at the next PSMB meeting.
- g. Roadmap for use of administrative data in the Pacific: PSMB encouraged PICTs to participate in the project (see 10 h. above), noting that making increased use of administrative data requires countries to take a step-by-step approach to developing the necessary systems, including eventually a population register. The benefits include lower costs than a full census, especially for PICTs with small populations, and more frequent updating of information.

PSMB governance

15. It is now nearly three years since PSMB was established in May 2018. At its meeting on 6 November, PSMB agreed to establish a subcommittee to review its TOR, including its decision-making process.
16. Under the TOR, the term of the PSMB Chair is for a period of 3 years. The appointment of the Chair is expected to be on the HOPS meeting agenda in 2021.

Future plans

17. The PSMB Chair said it seems an opportune time to look at PSMB's role and where its value lies. The Board has provided an excellent forum for discussion of 'what works in the Pacific' and has been able to make evidence-based recommendations for improved practices (e.g. for HIES and poverty measurement), and also to support related capacity building (e.g. the sampling guidelines). PACSTAT is an exciting opportunity to extend this work.
18. At the same time, there is a need to reflect on how PSMB fits into the wider picture of an evolving Pacific statistical system (e.g. a Pacific Centre of Excellence has been proposed) and how to ensure more effective representation of all NSOs.
19. The PSMB Chair acknowledged the support of colleagues and Government Statisticians, and the commitment of agencies including ABS, SPC, Stats NZ, the World Bank and UN agencies.

Agenda item 4: MFAT update / Pacific tourism statistics strategy

20. Mei Lin Harley (Senior Advisor, Pacific and Development Group, MFAT) said MFAT is committed to supporting the Pacific statistics system, including the work of SDD/SPC, particularly in data dissemination and the establishment of the PDH. MFAT also provides funding for the work of Stats NZ, the World Bank and UN agencies in the Pacific. Improved collaboration between NSOs, technical agencies and development partners is resulting in more coherence and reduced duplication.

21. Together with other PSSC members, MFAT looks forward to working with DFAT to firm up the TOR for the TYPSS review, which will be useful in assessing progress, and examining what has worked and where further attention or a change of approach may be needed. Consideration could be given to including a review of PSMB in the TYPSS review.

Pacific tourism statistics

22. Paul Davis (Senior Advisor, Tourism, MFAT) introduced a proposal to improve the collection and analysis of Pacific tourism statistics. Once borders reopen and tourism rebuilds, access to high-quality data will be important to guide policy and decisions to support the recovery of this key economic sector.
23. Tourism is a disparate sector with many subsectors, which creates challenges for collecting quality data for decision-making. There are also many players involved in supporting Pacific tourism and related data collection, including OECD, PARIS21, DFAT, MFAT, the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, the World Bank Group, and academic institutions.
24. MFAT has been working with the Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO), which is currently developing a Pacific tourism statistics strategy with the assistance of PARIS21. With funding from MFAT, SPTO is also undertaking a project to plan its future role in tourism data and statistics. This work has highlighted the need for better coordination between various agencies. A framework showing the players, their roles and activities in tourism research could be a starting point for greater synergy and cooperation relating to tourism data. MFAT was interested to hear the views of PSSC members.
25. Participants were encouraged to think of tourism not just as an economic sector, but to consider the benefits of joining up tourism data with the main socio-economic data collected in the Pacific. A joined-up analysis could help address key questions for policy makers.

Agenda item 5: Update from Statistics NZ on the Pacific Statistics Support Programme

26. Dr Ofa Ketu'u (Programme Manager, Pacific Statistics Support Programme, Stats NZ) presented the programme's objects and some of the 50 activities delivered under the four main output areas of the programme, which is fully funded by MFAT:
 1. Direct support for New Zealand realm countries – Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau: 35% of the programme's support goes to these countries, e.g. a senior analyst relocated to Samoa for three months to work with the Tokelau NSO on its latest population count. MFAT has provided funding to enable the three countries to conduct rapid assessment surveys of COVID impacts. Stats NZ is supporting these assessments in cooperation with the NSOs, SDD, and the World Bank.
 2. Pacific Annual Attachment Programme: Under this well-received programme, staff from Pacific NSOs spend several weeks in NZ to undertake a project with technical assistance from Stats NZ. Travel restrictions this year meant that only Pacific students already in NZ were able to benefit.
 3. Support for the Regional Statistics Development Programme includes Stats NZ's commitment to the PSMB and organisation of the annual regional sampling workshop.
 4. The programme also provides technical advice and support to MFAT on statistical investment in the Pacific.
27. The programme contributes to the Pacific vision of using data to better inform decision-making and will continue to support capacity building for PICT NSOs, which is a mutually beneficial process for Stats NZ staff. The programme also contributes to the NZ Government's 'Pacific reset'. COVID forced changes in the way the programme operated in 2020, creating new norms and requiring flexibility in providing remote support.
28. Dr Ketu'u thanked Pacific Government Statisticians for their collaboration and Stats NZ colleagues for their support.

Agenda item 6: Update from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

29. Teresa Dickinson (Deputy Australian Statistician, ABS) noted there had been no reduction in Australia's support for development in the Indo-Pacific region, which currently stands at AUD 4 billion, but there has been a COVID-related reshaping of that support. DFAT has released a 'Partnerships for recovery strategy' that focuses on three areas – health security, stability, and economic recovery. All programmes including ABS are expected to pivot to ensure their support and activities align with PICTs' COVID priorities and recovery efforts.
30. Dylan Roux, the previous focal point in DFAT, has left and his replacement has not yet been appointed. ABS will therefore take the issue of the delayed TYPSS review and the next phase of TYPSS to higher levels in DFAT and will seek SPC's support for this approach.
31. The Pacific Leadership Forum, which is usually a valuable opportunity for Chief Statisticians to come together for three days, will be held virtually in February or March 2021. The proposed theme is 'How do Government Statisticians approach a leadership role at a time like this?' Planning is underway for a three-hour meeting to be followed by further sessions based on areas of interest identified by the group. For many NSOs, resources have been cut. It is therefore important that NSOs are able to share information on how to maximise their impact in meeting government information needs in the COVID environment. ABS will work with Stats NZ and SPC to deliver the Forum and looks forward to seeing everyone there.
32. Though the pandemic has meant ABS has had to depart from its planned structured programme, it has been able to provide support in a range of areas, including:
 - a. CPI and national accounts (in collaboration with PFTAC): GDP for 2020/2021 has fallen, which has serious impacts on the region. In this climate, there is likely to be greater scrutiny of national accounts. ABS has provided virtual training to several NSOs, and specifically to Fiji on quality assurance for the compilation of its national accounts.
 - b. Samoa's drafting of its 10-year NSDS: ABS will provide support through a consultant (Jonathan Palmer).
 - c. CPI reweighting in Vanuatu: In response to a request from the NSO, ABS will also support rebasing of the CPI in a longer-term project.
 - d. CRVS – an important but challenging area: As a result of COVID impacts on workplans, ABS has had to temporarily suspend its core programme of support for CRVS in the Pacific and has redirected its efforts to supporting a review of BAG (with SPC) and its Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan.
 - e. Gender statistics: ABS provided advice on UN Women initiatives, including a Pacific Roadmap for Gender Statistics, and also delivered a training course to APEC countries.

Discussion

33. PFTAC asked ABS to coordinate with PFTAC on a regular basis to share information on its work to support national accounts. The ABS team will get in touch with PFTAC.

Agenda item 7: Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre (PFTAC) update

34. David Kloeden (PFTAC Coordinator) acknowledged PFTAC's major donors (Australia, New Zealand, EU, South Korea, Canada and ADB), and its Pacific member countries for their voluntary contributions.
35. Despite the COVID crisis, there was no interruption of PFTAC's delivery of services to countries in 2020. Almost all training moved online and, to the credit of experts and counterparts, this has been a positive experience for the most part. Good connectivity and established relationships are important factors for success.
36. The mid-term external evaluation of PFTAC's Phase V is well advanced with preliminary findings expected before the end of the year.

37. PFTAC delivered 54 remote missions in 2020, with Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga being the top beneficiaries of this assistance. A 4-point scale was devised to rank the degree to which PFTAC's assistance responded to countries' COVID-related priorities. Important areas of focus were cash management, taxpayer compliance, cyber risk management, and ensuring forecasts reflect COVID impacts and are based on timely data.
38. Recent and forthcoming initiatives include the following:
- A review of progress under the Public Financial Management Roadmap for Forum Island Countries (PFTAC was tasked with leading the Roadmap by FEMM in 2009). The review found both progress and reversals. Its findings have been published in an IMF working paper, which participants are encouraged to access.
 - A debt management capacity development programme (three years) financed by the Government of Japan. Recruitment of an advisor, who will be co-located with PFTAC, is underway.
 - US Government announcement of a USD 2 million contribution to PFTAC. This additional funding, and some underspending due to COVID restrictions, may permit a six-month extension of Phase V, which is due to end in April 2022. This would allow more time to develop the priorities and strategies for Phase VI.
 - The Government Finance Statistics (GFS) programme, which was extended by a year at the demand of members, is due to end in April 2021. A further extension of a few months may be possible. When the programme concludes, IMF support for GFS will be managed directly by the Statistics Office in Washington.
 - PFTAC is launching discussions with partners on capacity supplementation for some NSOs, in addition to capacity development.
39. Marcus Scheiblecker (Real Sector Statistician, PFTAC) summarised the current work of the Real Sector Statistics Programme, which includes online training on quarterly national accounts and seasonal adjustments (supported by ABS); experimental quarterly GDP programmes for Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga; assistance for updates of regular GDP publication for smaller states such as Kiribati, Niue, FSM and Tuvalu; and the first publication of Fiji's quarterly national accounts.
40. Luis Maria Temes Castrillon (GFS Adviser, PFTAC) said that in 2020 the GFS programme provided remote support for compilation and dissemination of quarterly and annual general government finance statistics for Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Palau, FSM, Timor-Leste and Nauru, and training on GFS principles. The support included documentation of guidelines and procedures that countries can use after the programme ends. For next year, missions are planned for Vanuatu, Samoa, Fiji, Tonga and Solomon Islands. A final workshop for all countries (either in person or virtual) is tentatively planned to conclude the GFS programme.

Agenda item 8: Update on the University of the South Pacific's Official Statistics Programme

41. The SDD Director presented the following update on behalf of Dr Rup Singh (Senior Lecturer and Academic Advisor for Economics, USP), who apologised for being unable to attend the meeting:
1. The Official Statistics (OS) programme was reviewed by three international experts in late 2019 and is now working on the feedback that was provided, including the idea of merging the OS and Population Studies and Demography (PD) courses into a single programme. The OS programme will be rebranded as 'Development Statistics'. Dr Ofa Ketu'u was acknowledged for leading the panel on the OS review.
 2. Despite the pandemic, there are 170 first-year OS students (around 7% more than in 2019) and 35 final-year students (20% more than in 2019).
 3. Two positions are being recruited for the PD programme. A graduate of the programme, Sumeet Lal, was awarded a scholarship to Hiroshima University (Japan) for PhD studies. His

research paper, 'Projecting populations for major Pacific Island Countries with and without COVID-19: Pro-active insights for population policy', has been accepted by the Journal of Population Research.

4. Using the latest trade statistics produced by SPC, the programme has completed another analytical paper on the effects of COVID-19 on PICTs for submission to a suitable journal and to wider stakeholders.
5. The Modelling Centre is dysfunctional at this stage, but it is hoped that it will start operating when USP governance issues are sorted out. In light of the latter, the faculty is being re-organised as the School of Accounting, Finance and Economics, which will house the OS/PD programme.

Discussion

42. Dr Ketu'u was pleased that USP had endorsed the recommendations of the review, which Stats NZ conducted in 2019 with two other consultants.

Agenda item 8: Update from NSOs on significant issues, challenges and developments in 2020 (Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, Tokelau, Tonga and Vanuatu)

43. Tonga

- a. Tonga currently has a large project with the World Bank, 'Statistical innovation and capacity building', which includes several initiatives, such as implementing a HIES using the new methodology; additions to economic statistics (new price surveys, national account surveys, a tourism satellite account) and data collection to improve disaster early-warning systems. The project also includes institutional strengthening, with a focus on analytical capacity and dissemination, and renewal of ICT equipment and office facilities.
- b. The NSDS is part of the government corporate plan, e.g. departments must identify which indicators they are reporting against. However, mobilising a NSDS remains a challenge that requires political commitment to the work of the NSO and governance of work towards the SDGs.
- c. The NSO invests time in advocacy, including outreach to communities, and promotion of the multiple benefits of statistical information, e.g. through disaggregation of disability statistics.
- d. To 'leave no one behind', Tonga is trying new ideas such as COVID-related HFPM surveys, social harm surveys (drug use), and informal sector surveys.
- e. NSO staff capacity has increased both in numbers and academic qualifications, with the recruitment of people with in-depth knowledge of areas such as GIS.

44. Fiji

- a. The NSO faces challenges with 17 positions not budgeted for in 2020 and a reduction in its overall budget compared to 2019. The COVID lockdown disrupted the NSO's work with all but a skeleton staff having to work from home during that period.
- b. There has been increased demand for statistics, with more requests coming from line ministries and internal government departments wanting to report on development indicators, rather than from international agencies as previously.
- c. HIES – Data collection for Fiji's HIES was completed in February 2020. The World Bank assisted the analysis and provided capacity building. The preliminary results are ready for presentation to the Permanent Secretary, which will be followed by preparation of a paper for Cabinet. The latter is necessary because this HIES was based on consumption rather than income as previously.
- d. MICS 2020/2021 – Supervisors are currently undergoing training. Collection will start in March 2021 for six weeks with the preliminary report expected around August 2021 and the final report towards the end of the year.

- e. Ad hoc surveys – In addition to scheduled surveys, two ad hoc surveys were carried out for the Reserve Bank (a demand-side survey, funded by IFS, and a survey on SME access to finance, funded by ADB). The NSO also assisted a UN survey on human trafficking. These surveys all ran in parallel.
- f. Gender assessment – The NSO is assisting the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to conduct the Fiji Country Gender Assessment.
- g. The Fiji NSO acknowledged the support of ABS and DFAT for the three-year technical assistance programme, which focuses on statistical leadership, and production and dissemination of statistics.

45. Cook Islands

(Cook Islands' report was presented under TYPSS Phase 3 objectives. The full presentation is available at <https://sdd.spc.int/events/2020/11/3rd-PSSC-meeting>).

- a. Objective 1: PICTs have technical capacity and statistical capability (either in-house or through TA) to manage and implement core statistical collections – The NSO aims to have the capacity required to fulfil its functions. Staffing is around 10 FTE and capacity for delivering core statistical collections has increased. However, the ability to use administrative data is limited by the quality of the data that is collected. The NSO appreciates the technical assistance received from Stats NZ and SPC.
- b. Objective 2: PICTs are producing and disseminating (either in-house or through TA and shared services) an agreed core set of high-quality economic, social and environmental statistics – Attempts to improve statistical literacy in the wider NSS have had mixed results, e.g. lower-level staff are sent for training rather than the higher-level staff required to facilitate collaboration.
- c. *Objective 3: All PICTs have in place some form of national statistics strategy or plan* – Cook Islands has an NSDS, but it is based on the pre-COVID situation. It needs revising due to the very different political and economic conditions that now prevail.
- d. Objective 4: National statistics stakeholders are advised on an ongoing basis about emerging statistical tools, systems and international standards – Results from the RMI HIES experiment and other recommendations from PSMB have helped shape current and future collection methodologies in Cook Islands.
- e. Lessons from TYPSS:
 - Advances in technology including CAPI, CATI and CAWI, have worked well. What has worked less well is engagement with the wider NSS, e.g. government departments contact the NSO only when they need data immediately.
 - Opportunities for TYPSS II include use of CATI to survey remote populations and reduce costs.
- f. Priorities for Cook Islands include a combined Agriculture and Population Census and updating the NSDS to reflect the post-COVID environment.

46. Nauru

(Nauru's report was presented under TYPSS Phase 3 objectives. The full presentation is available at <https://sdd.spc.int/events/2020/11/3rd-PSSC-meeting>).

- a. *Objective 1: A dysfunctional NSS, resulting from staff turnover and lack of prioritisation in other governments departments (e.g. customs, health, education and civil registry), adversely affects the work of Nauru's Bureau of Statistics. Greater use of administrative data cannot occur until government agency databases are established, reinstated or updated. Some databases (e.g. fisheries) are held by regional agencies.*
- b. *Objective 2: In recent years, dissemination has dropped as the Bureau has focused on preparing for surveys aimed at collecting baseline data for national priorities including the SDGs. As explained above, there are gaps in statistical collections which cannot be filled by administrative data.*

The Bureau is not the lead agency for SDG reporting but has developed plans linked to the national plan for a web portal to showcase progress towards the SDGs.

- c. *Objective 3:* An NSDS has been developed. After costing is completed, it will be submitted for government approval. However, the new government has different priorities, which are outside the scope of the existing national plan and NSDS.
- d. *Objective 4:* Most external advisors who were acting as heads of ministries or agencies have left Nauru due to the pandemic or ending of contracts, leaving a void in expertise and several unfilled positions. The Bureau is looking at the use of new tools and scaled-down approaches to reduce the respondent burden and help populate databases that contribute to government priorities. However, this will not occur before the end of TYPSS 1. Small PICTs have difficulty collecting data for Tier 2 and 3 indicators.
- e. Potential issues for the next TYPSS:
 - Many surveys are still being undertaken without NSOs being informed.
 - The findings of the ICT working group and other working groups under TYPSS appear to have been shelved. Nauru would like more support for using scaled-down approaches complemented by statistical databases to provide the data required for government priorities.
- f. *Objective 5: Regional governance and coordination of statistics* – Regional governance of statistics has been wrested from the control of PICTs, particularly small PICTs, and development partners drive their own agendas with inadequate consultation.

There are no additional resources for PICT representatives of subregions to communicate with their constituents. PICTs could do better by talking directly to each other. (Nauru represents the Micronesia subregion and small NSOs.)

47. Vanuatu

(Vanuatu's report was presented under TYPSS Phase 3 objectives. The full presentation is available at <https://sdd.spc.int/events/2020/11/3rd-PSSC-meeting>).

- a. *Objective 1:* Following a restructure, the NSO has 21 new positions, including a Metadata Officer to support documentation, and a Data Collection Management Unit to improve capacity in managing and implementing national collections. There are currently nine vacancies – increased capacity has contributed to higher staff turnover.
- b. A 15-year schedule for core collections has support from the Council of Ministers. The 2020 National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) is currently underway, and fieldwork for the NSDP Baseline Survey was completed in February.
- c. *Objective 2:* Vanuatu has a Country Development plan (NSDP 2030) and M&E framework and is working with partners at the World Bank, ILO, University of Melbourne and SPC to produce analysis reporting from the NSDP Baseline Survey to inform the framework and update key development indicators.
- d. *Objective 3:* PARIS21 supported a review of the NSDS. There are plans to launch the revised strategy (2021–2025) in the first half of 2021.
- e. *Objective 4:* National stakeholders are regularly advised of emerging statistical tools, systems and international standards. Increasing the use of administrative data will require more effective coordination with the NSS.
- f. *Objective 5:* NSO aims include
 - a long-term vision to become a bureau/constitutional body (like ABS or Stats NZ);
 - delivering provincial statistics on a more regular basis;
 - partnering with parliament in a project to produce profiles for all 18 constituencies to improve statistical advocacy and evidence-based decisions.
- g. Considerations for the next TYPSS

- Review and implementation of statistical legislation, and development of model legislation that can be adapted to each PICT’s context.
- NSDS-led partnership between countries and SPC (SPC supports NSDS development, but implementation support/coordination is limited);
- Funding support for surveys (and census). Use of new methodologies to cut down survey/data collection costs, and testing of CATI for surveys.
- UN fundamental principles of official statistics (essential) and a statistical literacy project to build OS recognition.
- Investment in administrative sources/civil registration systems and other data sources (including big data).
- Statistical capacity building for NSO and NSS statisticians.
- Development of national accounts.
- Disaster statistics frameworks (including regionally agreed indicators) and a data collection support mechanism with financing. Improved NSO capacity to manage disaster responses, including establishing a disaster plan of action.

48. The Chair thanked the Government Statisticians for their updates and noted that Tokelau’s presentation (not presented to the meeting) was available online.

Agenda item 9: Update on topics for the 2021 HOPS meeting and future focus

49. The SDD Director said it was now planned to hold a two-day virtual meeting of HOPS 6 in April 2021. Topics for the HOPS 6 agenda were presented and discussed at PSSC2 in the expectation that HOPS would be held in 2020. This list of topics has since been added to (e.g. COVID recovery) to ensure the agenda is relevant and focused on members’ concerns.

50. The following revised list of topics for the HOPS 6 agenda was presented for discussion:

1. Governance

- a. Pacific statistics governance framework: Action since HOPS 5
- b. Outcomes of PSSC3 and follow-up
- c. Outcomes of PSMB research and methodological recommendations
- d. Status of proposal for Pacific Statistics Financing Facility

2. COVID-related data needs

- a. Increasing use of administrative data as lead indicators of socio-economic impacts
- b. Consequences for statistical systems of regional/global commitments made by governments
- c. Capacity building to support better use of data in policy- and decision-making
- d. Introduction to the Pacific Data Hub and dotStat

3. Regional statistics projects

- a. Updates from NSOs, donors and development partners
- b. PACSTAT – opportunity for innovative research (What if we did it differently? What data do policy-makers want at their fingertips?)
- c. MFAT project ‘Improving access to Pacific statistics and data’ through support for SDD/PDH

4. Key issues

- a. Greater engagement of planners (as key data users) at sector level – in economic recovery, health, gender and population policy – as well as in national planning
- b. Advocacy of virtuous circle of data production → use → policy → outcome

Discussion

51. TYPSS review

- Participants agreed that given HOPS is the top decision-making body for statistics, it is critical that the TYPSS review is completed before HOPS 6.
- As mentioned during the update from ABS (Agenda item 6), Teresa Dickinson undertook to escalate the issue of the delay in the TYPSS review to higher levels in DFAT and to advise the PSSC Chair of DFAT's response. (It was hoped the discussion with DFAT would occur within the next 2 weeks.)

52. Review timing

- Participants agreed that if the review is to be completed before HOPS, the TOR would have to be finalised in the next 2–3 weeks. The consultant should be appointed as soon as possible after that to allow the review to begin around mid-January. The review was expected to take four to six weeks.

53. HOPS 6 agenda

Participants:

- noted the issues of concern raised by Government Statisticians in their updates (Agenda item 8), such as the need to improve coordination between NSOs and the wider NSS, and the specific challenges of small and under-resourced NSOs;
- suggested that some priority items should be decided on immediately to allow the necessary preparatory work to be done before HOPS, such as the TYPSS review, and an update on the Pacific Statistics Financing Facility (to avoid covering the same ground as last year);
- agreed with the suggestion that the secretariat should circulate the draft list of HOPS 6 topics to PSSC members and allow two weeks for feedback before finalising it;
- noted the Chair's request that PSSC representatives of subregions contact their constituents in other PICTs to get their feedback on the list. As well as contributing to the development of the HOPS agenda, these views from countries could be useful for the TYPSS review.

54. *Engagement of planners in HOPS* – Participants discussed how to increase the engagement of planners in HOPS, given the meeting's focus on the strategic direction for statistics. It was suggested that planners could attend part of the meeting (e.g. a half day) for sessions on more policy-oriented topics such as COVID recovery. Alternatively, representative planners could attend, rather than planners from every PICT.

55. The SDD Director stressed that it is important for member PICTs that their planners are involved in HOPS and similar regional meetings (the issue was also raised at CRGA). Others agreed, noting that:

- one of the aims of HOPS was to increase synergy between the statistics and planning sectors and improve understanding of each other's needs;
- there is a need for dialogue at HOPS between planners/policy-makers and data custodians on the benefits of access to microdata. At the moment reluctance to release microdata means countries are missing out on opportunities for data-driven decision-making;
- planners and statisticians need to work hand in hand, Data only becomes a tool for development when it is used. Planners – both economic and social planners – need to understand the process and cost of data collection. They can also be advocates for the statistical sector.

Closing

56. The SDD Director thanked the Chair, Ipia Gadabu, and Deputy Chair, Dr Viliami Fifita. He said the Government Statisticians had provided valuable insights into what is happening on the ground and had also highlighted further scope for peer-to-peer exchanges between NSOs.

57. The Chair thanked all members for their participation and contributions to the discussions and said they would be informed soon of progress on the TYPSS review.

58. The dates and location of PSSC's 2021 meeting will be advised in due course.

Annex 1: 3rd Pacific Statistics Standing Committee (PSSC) – Meeting outcomes

[PSSC3 Nov 2020 Meeting Outcome statement](#)

Annex 2: PSSC3 List of participants

[PSSC3 Nov 2020 Participant List](#)