

# National Statistical System Reform

## The Problem

Prior to the national statistics reform, the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS), which had been the apex data producing agency in Nigeria since 1947, had failed to meet its mandate of producing adequate, accurate, and timely data needed for decision-making. Falling into decay in much of the 1990s, the agency's performance reached its lowest ebb between 2000 and 2003. The reasons for this included, the poor attention from government, bad management, a bloated and low quality workforce, a preponderance of non-professional staff (particularly administrative and accounting personnel), archaic data production and management technologies, and low morale and productivity of workers. All these manifested either in non-production of relevant statistics needed for planning and evidence-based policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, or, at best, the production of data that were untimely and often without any iota of integrity. In essence, the then Federal Office of Statistics lacked the capacity required to generate the requisite data both in terms of quality and timeliness for usage.

## Reform Actions

As a first step in reforming the statistical sector, the federal government merged the Federal Office of Statistics and National Data Bank to form the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The broad objective of the reform undertaken at the NBS was to implement the Statistical Master Plan (SMP) and to transform the agency into a world-class National Statistical Office (NSO), which will be able to produce adequate, high quality, and timely data relevant to the demands of users in government, the universities and research institutes, private sector organisations, and international agencies.

In order to actualise this objective, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reform process was driven by three policy instruments, namely:

- The five-year National Statistical Master Plan (2004) used as the roadmap to drive the current reform process
- The Statistical Act (2007) which empowered the National Bureau of Statistics as custodian of official statistics
- The National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (2010)

The NBS reform agenda covered four main areas, namely:

- Infrastructure and equipment
- Human resources management and development
- Improved data production methodology
- Data management, dissemination and access

## Main Achievements

The main achievements of the national statistics reform efforts include:

- Operationalisation of the new 2007 Statistics Act, which repealed the 1957 Statistics Act
- Transformation of the NBS into a statistical office that is capable of meeting the data requirements of its users and which has enabled it undertake some landmark policy initiatives in this regard
- Development and operationalisation of content-laden technical coordination mechanism for the entire national statistical system
- Establishment of the National Data Centre in Abuja and six Zonal Data Processing Centres in the country. The National Data Centre is the first of its kind in Africa; with capacity, for world-wide dissemination, archiving, and connectivity of statistical system.
- Operationalisation of a robust organogram that reflects the professionalisation of the National Bureau of Statistics
- Production of the Compendium of Statistical Terms, Concepts, Definitions and Methodology as a back-bone to the management of the System of Administrative Statistics (SAS) as one of Nigeria's contributions to world statistical development system
- Development, at the state level, of an electronic data captures mechanism for the compilation of state and local government areas level statistics. This is what is being used for the compilation of state, zonal and national statistical yearbooks.
- Establishment of a functional web portal that houses all National Bureau of Statistics micro- and macro-levels survey sector data that can be reached by all users of statistics all over the world. The web portal enjoys an average of 25,000 hits per month.
- Establishment of State Bureau of Statistics in 18 states with Statistician Generals appointed and with the enactment and passage of the State Statistics Edict. The States are Abia, Anambra, Cross Rivers, Enugu, Ekiti, Gombe, Imo, Kwara, Lagos, Niger, Ondo, Oyo, Plateau, Sokoto, and Zamfara State.
- Installations of Virtual Private Network (VPN) Project with the aim of ensuring a seamless flow of statistical information amongst statistical producing states
- Massive deployment of Information and Communications Technology in all stages of data production from data capture to dissemination
- Establishment of a robust website through which NBS documents could be accessed
- Professionalisation of the National Bureau of Statistics with a higher percentage of technical staff compared to support staff. The quality of statistical data has significantly improved with capacity for worldwide dissemination, archiving and connectivity.
- Successful rebasing of Nigeria's gross domestic product
- Data Release Calendar – NBS now publishes an online data release calendar at the start of every year. This calendar shows the expected release dates for all reports and data collection activities, in the process helping their numerous users and subscribers to plan effectively.
- Methodology Review for Labour, Poverty and Price Statistics – In a bid to enhance the quality of data, NBS embarked on a comprehensive methodology review for computing macro-economics and socio-economic indicators. It was part of this process that culminated in the rebasing of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimates. The same review process has been carried out for Labour, Poverty and Prices Statistics. Several stakeholder committees were set up to review and recommend appropriate methodologies that satisfy international standards as well as appropriate for the

peculiar nature of the Nigerian economy. The results of these reviews have significantly enhanced the quality and acceptability of recently published statistical data, a fact that has been acknowledged both domestically and internationally.

- Increase in the Use of Statistical Data – there has been a significant increase in the use of statistical data for evidence based policy, planning and decision making. This has been a result of reforms carried out particularly under the NBS statistical advocacy and sensitisation programme. NBS is now part of several presidential and ministerial committees such as the Economic Management and Implementation Committee (EMIT), the Presidential Committee on Job Creation, Inter-Ministerial Committee on Data Harmonisation just to mention a few. Also, this increase in the use of data is evident in the number of data requests and collaboration NBS receives on a daily basis, both locally and internationally. NBS’ website now records over 4 million visits and downloads annually, as opposed to 5 thousand hits in 2005.

## Key Challenges

In spite of the notable successes recorded, the NBS still faces some challenges. These are:

1. The politicisation of the data produced, which is made up of information reported by individuals or establishments in the questionnaires they process. When the results are published certain groups, who have preconceived ideas of what the results should be, use the data wrongly to suit their own objectives or political agenda
2. Poor government funding
3. Weak collaboration efforts amongst agencies
4. Slow pace of statistical development at the sub-national level of government
5. Low statistical awareness
6. Continued apathy towards statistics and its importance, particularly by MDAs

## Assessment of Reform Initiative

Assessed against the 10 criteria for judging the success of government reforms initiatives, it is clear that the NBS has been a huge success:

S/No.	Assessment Criteria	Result of Assessment
1.	Has the NBS reform improved the quality and quantity of public services?	The NBS reform has significantly improved the quality and quantity of public services in terms of the high quality production of timely data relevant to the demands of users in government, academia, research institutes, private sector, and donor agencies.
2.	Do more people now have access to services, including disadvantaged groups such as women, young persons, and people with disabilities?	More people now have access to services in terms of the fact that the NBS now has a functional web portal that houses micro- and macro-levels survey data that can be accessed by all users of statistics all over the world. It is estimated that the web portal enjoys an average of 25,000 hits per month from all classes of people. However, there is

<b>S/No.</b>	<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Result of Assessment</b>
		still a need to make data more accessible to people with disabilities and those that may be unable to access the website.
3.	Has the NBS reform reduced the cost of governance?	The NBS reform has reduced the cost of governance in terms of the accessibility of statistical data through the Internet, thereby reducing the costs of travelling and delays associated with collecting data in the recent past. In addition, there is also a reduction in the high cost of engagement of consultants by government for statistical data collection and analysis.
4.	Has the NBS reform made the services more affordable for citizens?	The NBS reform has made services more affordable to citizens in terms of the accessibility of NBS data and services through the Internet in a timely manner.
5.	Has the NBS reform reduced corruption?	The reforms have reduced corruption among NBS staff who previously used government facilities and resources for private business.
6.	Has the NBS reform reduced unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape?	The NBS reform has reduced unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape in terms of the ability to produce high quality data needed by policy-makers in a timely manner, including carrying out additional surveys when necessary, where such data is not in existence.
7.	Is the policy likely to lead to improved development outcomes?	The policy has led to improved development outcomes in terms of the reliance of government on the empirical evidence of benchmarking policy intervention in the execution of programmes and project.
8.	Are things improving, staying the same, or getting worse?	Things are improving in statistical management at the federal level in Nigeria, but there is still a lot of work to do on the production of sub-national statistics.
9.	Where things are improving, will those improvements endure?	Improvements will endure as they become more entrenched.
10.	Where things are not improving, what should be done?	Not Applicable

## Proposed Next Steps

1. Full operationalisation of the National Bureau of Statistic Act (2007)
2. Improved funding of NBS activities
3. Strengthening of collaborative efforts among critical agencies and stakeholders
4. Capacity-building support to sub-national governments and NGOs to strengthen stakeholders' collaborative efforts on statistics management