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Items for discussion and decision: Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development

Background document
Available in English only

Coordinating statistical training for increased accessibility and sustainability: the work of the Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training (GIST)

Prepared by Global Network of Institutes for Statistical Training (GIST)

Coordinating statistical training for increased accessibility and sustainability



Global Network of Institutions
for Statistical Training (GIST)

Overview

This background document provides an overview of the work of the members of the Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training (GIST). It has three main parts:

1. A summary of key achievements in 2022, with an emphasis on tools and guidance materials that have been developed for the benefit of the statistical community.
2. A more detailed overview of the work of GIST, including the current task teams and
3. A brief overview of preliminary plans for continued work in 2023.

The GIST homepage provides general information on the Network, including its overall goals and objectives, current members and strategic action areas. Please visit the page here:

<https://unstats.un.org/gist/>

1. Key achievements

In the past year, the key accomplishments of GIST were multi-faceted and benefited greatly from the feedback received from the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) in the beginning of 2022. All three task teams saw an expansion of members that helped cover more statistical sectors, as well as bringing more resources and increasing the output of GIST.

The following are among the highlights of the achievements

i. Assessment of training needs

In response to a discussion in the SAG about the need for a gap analysis in capacity, the task team on Addressing NSO Needs developed a framework for assessment and surveys, based on it to assess the training needs of both national statistical offices (NSO) as well as national statistical systems (NSS). Surveys were designed to assess the skills of all personnel – technical, managerial, and support staff - that contribute to the success of an NSO or and NSS at three levels – individual, managerial and in agencies that are part of the statistical system. Along with the self-assessment tool comes also a brief guidance for NSOs and NSS managements on how to prioritize the training offers based on the findings of the survey, also making use of the online resources that are becoming more readily available. Read more on this under the task team information below.

ii. Increase in the number of online course offerings through UN SDG:Learn

GIST members and partners continued to add courses and microlearning materials to the UN SDG:Learn statistics hub. A key development in this regard was a new partnership with the [Inter-Agency and Expert Groups on the Sustainable Development Goals \(IAEG-SDGs\)](#) which now also is using the hub to upload training and guidance materials related to SDG monitoring. In the last year the number of courses increased from around 70 to 86, and the number of microlearning materials from around 30 to 78. More is expected to be added in the course of 2023.

iii. Guidance on effective remote learning and certification programs

As all kinds of virtual and blended trainings become popular, there is a need for more guidance on making remote learning more effective. This was again an area that was highlighted by the SAG as well as the Board members. The task team on online gateway and e-learning community of practices produced guidance on the best practices for online training. In addition, Board members had discussed the importance of certification as a motivation to learn and take courses. It was further discussed in the task team and work was initiated to produce a report on various systems of certification that training institutions currently use.

iv. Guidance on statistical literacy initiatives

This year, GIST added a key partner as member to enhance the work of the Statistical Literacy task team. [International Statistical Literacy Project](#) was brought on board to push the agenda on this front. New initiatives in this area were compiled. In addition, an outline of a guidance for NSOs on promoting statistical literacy was drafted.

v. Publicity of the work of GIST through an annual newsletter

Finally, it was recognized in the Annual meeting and open forms that the work of GIST needed to be publicized more widely and the resources produced used by the beneficiaries. The first GIST newsletter was well received, so the work was continued. The second issue is [here](#).

2. Overall update on the work of GIST

This year there were some significant changes to the membership and organizational structure of GIST. Also, this was the first year upon the advice of the SAG, a workplan for the year was drafted at the beginning of the year. The workplan drafted activities that the task teams should accomplish, as well as the role GIST members would play and how they would contribute to the work.

2.1. Increased membership and adding co-leads to task teams

To bring in more voices and contributions, GIST brought onboard new and significant partners that were enthusiastic to contribute their input. New members included Afristat, Colombia, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD), the International Statistical Literacy Project (ISLP), the Office of National Statistics of the United Kingdom (ONS), Statistics Ireland, UN Women and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

As GIST matures, the work of its task teams has increased, and partner members have had to take on more responsibility. To address this greater workload, GIST decided to not only expand the number of members this year, but also to change the leadership structure of the task-teams. Each task team now has a team lead and a task team co-lead. The members which filled the roles in 2022 are;

- Task team 1 – addressing NSO needs: Mamadou Cisse (IDEP) lead; Dag-Roll Hansen (Statistics Norway) co-lead
- Task team 2 – Online gateway and e-learning community of practice: Shailja Sharma (UN SIAP) lead; Cristina Petracchi and Sophie Ditlecadet (FAO) co-leads
- Task team 3 – Statistical literacy: Elena Proden (UNITAR) lead; Bianca Walsh (IBGE) co-lead

This re-structuring has helped making the work less vulnerable to progress as more people are involved in planning and organizing the meetings and prioritized work.

2.2. Work of the GIST Board

The board met on average every second month to discuss progress of work and any upcoming activities and needs. In the second half of the year, the Board was extended to also include the co-leads of the task teams.

This year brings to a close the current Chair, Dr. Mitali Sen's two-year term. Elena Proden of UNITAR has kindly agreed to serve as the next Chair of GIST.

Apart from the work done by the individual teams, there are some activities that are cross functional and of benefit to all areas. For example, communication and outreach continue to be important areas where GIST needs to grow. This remains an overall responsibility of the Board. In 2022 it developed a second newsletter and continued engagement on social media. It also organized an open side-event at the UN Statistical Commission.

Similarly, the accessibility of GIST products and work remains limited because it is mostly available only in English. For GIST to truly serve more countries across the globe that need the assistance to produce SDGs indicators, its work needs to be translated into other languages, such as Arabic, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. Due to capacity limitations, the board did not follow up as actively on this as intended but will scale up the work in 2023 (see also below for more on this).

The GIST annual meeting also proposed various ways of bringing more funding to the network. The board initiated follow up work on fundraising and will continue the work in 2023.

2.3. Work of the task teams

There are three task teams that are currently implementing much of the work of GIST:

- Task team on Online Gateway and e-learning community of practice
- Task team on Statistical literacy
- Task team on Addressing NSO demand

2.3.1. Online gateway and e-learning community of practice

In 2020 GIST published a statistics gateway or hub for statistical training materials on UN SDG:Learn; www.unsdglearn.org/statistics. It provides information on courses and trainings provided by different actors in the statistics community, specifying who the training provider is and has link to where the course can be found. During the past year, the task team and GIST members continued to expand the number of courses available. The gateway now includes over 140 courses and microlearning materials on official statistics. It continues to serve as an entry point for those interested in training courses on official statistics.

A key factor to the expansion was the initiation of a collaboration with the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (IAEG-SDGs). At the 53rd session of the UN Statistical Commission, member states encouraged the IAEG-SDGs to share all capacity-building and training programmes and materials on SDG monitoring on a common platform for all to benefit¹. Based on this,

¹https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_53/documents/2022-41-FinalReport-E.pdf; C, 53/101 (i), page 11

GIST offered the IAEG-SDGs to also make use of the UN SDG:Learn platform which was agreed by IAEG-SDGs member in the second half of 2022. The IAEG-SDGs secretariat has since reached out to custodian agencies and some have already started adding their materials to the platform. The work will be continued in 2023.

UNITAR, who co-leads the overall development work of the UN SDG:Learn platform with the UN System Staff College, also continued work to further develop and improve the platform to make it even easier to navigate for users. They have also committed to continued support moving forward.

Of new developments, the task team worked on i) an initial assessment and potential template for certification of courses, and ii) approaches and recommendations to effective online trainings. The paper can be a useful resource/starting point for GIST members and others working on statistical capacity building on the two topics mentioned.

Based on discussions held during meetings of the task team, a paper has been drafted on the types of credentials offered and the certification processes/ practices employed by a selection of statistical training institutes that are members of GIST. It captures their practices in relation to the certification of their courses with a view to identifying best practices that can help define standards and set quality assurance procedures for use by statistical training institutes. GIST members will continue the work on this in 2023 and expect to make the materials generally available on the GIST website later in the year.

GIST member institutions have relied extensively on online trainings since the beginning of the pandemic. Task team members discussed approaches and recommendations to effective online trainings and have drafted a paper on this topic. The paper covers common challenges faced by training institutions in conducting online trainings and discusses lessons learned/recommendations on how to meet these common challenges. This paper is expected to be made available on the GIST website once finalized.

2.3.2. Statistical Literacy in the context of the 2030 Agenda

The task team seeks to motivate the international statistical system to promote statistical literacy initiatives recognizing that NSOs in particular have a special role in promoting this type of literacy. Work of the task team has benefitted from an enlarged membership in 2022, including the new partnership with the International Statistical Literacy Project (ISLP).

In 2022, a concept note for a guidance document for NSOs on statistical literacy has been produced as part of this work. The purpose of the document is to provide a guideline for statistical agencies on how to approach the implementation of statistical literacy initiatives, including sections dedicated to the scope of statistical literacy, the identification of target audiences and key partners, a possible diagnostics approach and a matrix to examine the specific situation and conditions under which each NSO operates, as well as the recommendations on actions NSOs could promote. The recommendations are expected to be formulated based on the results of the above country diagnostics and by drawing on good practices available in the GIST statistical literacy inventory and other related sources. The outline of the guideline also includes a section on the evaluation of statistical literacy initiatives, an area where the task team also completed some initial methodological work in 2022.

The task team had earlier developed an **inventory of materials on statistical literacy** relevant to official statistics. A template for initiatives in statistical literacy had been developed and piloted through drafts by task team members. The literacy materials are classified using a few key dimensions. The first key dimension considers the main recipients of the statistical literacy materials: school children, students, media, decision makers or others. Other dimensions are type of guidance or learning materials, language of the material, etc. Both the US Census Bureau and the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) have for example statistical literacy programs and practical toolkits for schools, to be used by teachers in lessons. Another example is the international poster competition of the International Statistical Literacy Project (ISLP), which has reached more than 50,000 school students across more than 30 countries. In 2022, follow-up has been made to further enrich the inventory. In particular, the ISLP representatives collected a range of initiatives from national coordinators. As a result, in 2022, 14 cases of statistical literacy were added, and the group is constantly aiming for more cases. Currently, the inventory can be found [here](#).

This task team was initiated in 2018 when GIST conducted a survey among policy makers on their overall statistical literacy level. The insights from the survey and from SAG members have led to the development of an **e-learning course on statistical literacy** led by UNITAR where UNSD and UNECA also provided input and that is currently available on UN SDG:learn [here](#). The course as well as several learning videos were developed subsequently by UNSD and UNITAR serve as resources that NSOs can use and promote among data users to help increase their statistical literacy. Furthermore, the work on competencies and methods to address the statistical literacy of policy-makers is further disseminated through publications by the task team members.

Aim: To increase statistical literacy among important user groups

2.3.3. Addressing specific NSO demands

This task team has in the last 1-2 years focused on how to support NSOs with weak training mechanisms in-house in how to set up and maintain sustainable training programs. In this context, the need for NSOs to have a tool and guidance on how to understand and assess the training needs of their staff has been highlighted as a need. A second need is to evaluate the learnings from the needs assessment and based on that prioritize trainings to be provided based on resources available.

A consultant, brought in by UNSD, has helped substantially progress this work. A set of draft questionnaires have been developed which are aimed at i) individual staff, ii) managers and iii) staff in agencies that are part of the NSS. Along with this comes a guidance which explains the training needs assessment questionnaire, provides suggestions on how to prioritize training needs. It further provides an overview of different types of trainings and provides suggestions on how to better explore facilitated training in-house. A list of links to relevant e-learnings is also included. Materials will be shared with GIST members for input and review in the first half of 2023 and subsequently be made available on the GIST webpages.

Two countries, Ethiopia and Ghana, have in parallel worked on improving their training programs. Ethiopia worked with GIST members (primarily Statistics Norway) on making trainings and establishing routines for running an in-house training program.- From there, work was also further developed, but has been paused due to change of management and revision of priorities for the NSO. GIST will explore

further interest in 2023. Ghana has also progressed its work after initial engagement with GIST members in the area.

Malawi and Nepal have also shown interest in the work in 2022 and may be pilot countries for the new questionnaires and guidance developed.

3. Suggested plans for 2023

This section outlines overall priorities and plans of the work, as well as that of the task teams. The suggestions are kept quite general as the GIST members and Stakeholder Advisory Group will provide their input to the work of GIST at the Annual meeting on 16th February. Following the meeting, more detailed plans will be developed. The amount of work will further be guided by the amount of human and financial resources that the GIST members can contribute to carry out the tasks.

3.1 Continued work on outreach, communication and fundraising

GIST will continue to develop newsletters on the work around statistical training, including a mixture of news in availability of trainings, developments of work under the GIST umbrella and interview with members to showcase the great work that is being done across its member agencies. It will also continue engaging on various communication platforms (LinkedIn, Twitter, Global Network of Data Officers) to promote the platform and new courses.

The UN SDG:Learn platform includes a blog section on various topics and initial discussions have begun on developing a blog series on data and statistics covering various topics that reach a wider audience. The GIST board will also engage in this.

The board will further explore the possibilities of fundraising beyond what GIST members can contribute in-kind and financially.

3.2. Making materials available in more languages

The GIST board will more substantially get the discussion started among interested GIST members on how we collectively can translate more of the training materials into other languages than English. This includes materials that GIST develops, but also courses available on the UN SDG:Learn platform. A meeting will be set up initially asking all who are interested in contributing to this to engage and discuss how the work can best be taken forward.

The Board will also explore if partnerships can be explored with other agencies to cover the translation of materials. Another avenue to explore is to make use of AI and automated translation tools.

3.3. Work of the task teams

All task teams will continue the work of 2022. This currently includes:

- Online gateway and e-learning community of practice:
 - Continue work related to UN SDG:Learn statistics hub.

- Continue work to include more courses
 - Continue collaboration with IAEG-SDGs
 - Update GIST platform, in particular the Courses Inventory page (<https://unstats.un.org/gist/resources/courses-inventory/>) which contains information from 2018
 - Assess possibility of translating overall content of UN SDG:Learn
 - Define easily understood categories/types of microlearning and archive old materials
 - Review alternatives to the archiving by default of all courses after one year of inactivity
- Continue work on course review and evaluation
- Potentially start working on a guidance on how to provide trainings in a virtual and remote format
- Statistical Literacy in the context of the 2030 Agenda
 - Continue work on the statistical literacy initiatives inventory, adding more entries, and promoting awareness
 - Further develop the guide for NSOs and NSS on how to engage with the population around statistical literacy
 - Continue to engage with IAEG-SDGs on further dissemination of capacity development materials through UNSDG Learn
- Addressing specific NSO demands
 - Continue work on sustainable statistical training programs, exploring ways to set up the self-assessment questionnaire for training needs in survey platforms.
 - Engage with pilot countries to test the new tool and guidance
 - Based on testing, consider further developing the materials.

The task teams will also agree on further tasks, based on internal discussions as well as input from the SAG, Board and other members of the statistical community.