

REGIONAL TECHNICAL WORKSHOP ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS IN THE GCC

COUNTRIES

Marriott Hotel, Doha

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1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

There is a need in the region to increase the use of disaggregated data to foster evidence based, people-centered planning; to enhance human development analysis on which policy proposals are based; and to establish a better understanding of differences between national, regional and global data. It is against this background that the Qatar Statistics Authority (QSA), in cooperation with the United Nations Human Development Programme (UNDP)—namely Human Development Report Office (HDRO) and its Regional Bureau for the Arab States, organized a Regional Workshop on Human Development Indicators for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member countries on 21-23 January, 2008 at the Marriott Hotel in Doha.

The event brought together senior statisticians and focal points with responsibility for the production of Human Development Report (HDR), from national statistical offices and relevant Government Ministries. The QSA has also invited experts from United Nations organizations and international agencies, responsible for indicators/datasets relevant to the measurement of human development issues. This event complemented other work in the region in support of the MDGs.

The workshop was intended to increase the quality and policy relevance of statistical work in the GCC region and to encourage innovative measurement work, while adhering to statistical standards. Through technical guidance, substantive exchanges and the sharing of experiences, the workshop also sought to develop the competencies to support human development policies based on comprehensive and objective data.

2. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AND WELCOME

a. Keynote of Sheikh Hamad Bin Jabor Bin Jasem Al Thani, QSA

The opening speech was addressed by Sheikh Hamad, who said that the workshop is intended to complement other work in the region in support of the Millennium Development Goals. He thanked UNDP, and in specific, the Human Development Report Office, as well as the participating UN and international organizations namely World Bank, UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) and UN-ESCWA for their participation and support to this event. He also declared that the progress which was made by Qatar in the field of human development, was not only limited to its physical boundaries and the upgrading infrastructure, but it goes beyond that to reach broader humanitarian dimension by expanding human capabilities. He drew upon the objectives of the workshop and hoped that the workshop will give an opportunity to the participants from GCC countries and the international organizations to share their latest information about their national human development indicators, and to reflect that into the next Human Development Reports.

b. Keynote of Sayed Aqa, UNDP Representative

In his statement, Mr. Aqa expressed its contentment that UNDP and GCC are cooperating in this event. He said that statistics are vital in terms of measuring human development and Millennium Development Goals, and that the real challenge is in the data and their sources and how to address them. He also underlined the fact that human development is a key effort to UNDP endeavors and that UNDP is ready to provide all kind of support and technical assistance to countries toward achieving that end.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

The workshop' objectives were outlined by Ahmad Hussein, Statistics Advisor, QSA and Chair of the Workshop, as follows:

- Propose solutions to existing methodological and data challenges in the region;
- Discuss the roles of national, regional, and international data collectors and users, and challenges involving standardized data, their timeliness and comparability;
- Explore a number of crosscutting themes relevant to forthcoming sub-regional or national analytical reports and their data implications;
- Identify how to better link data with the policy recommendations outlined in the reports.
- Share strategies on the effective use of human development data for outreach and advocacy purposes;
- Encourage new approaches and methodologies for measuring human development by sharing innovative practices drawing on research and experience of HDRs and the wider statistical community.

Mr Hussein tackled the challenges in data quality, availability and institutional responsibilities in preparing human development report as well as capacity building efforts needed towards that end. He also briefed the participants on the resource materials which have been distributed in the workshop namely the Primer, which is reference tool that provides guidance on statistical principles for producing evidence-based policy recommendations and quality HDR, and Qatar Statistical Strategy for the Development of National Statistics. He ended his presentation by the expected outputs of the workshop which is to reach a common understanding of statistics principles, and finding solution to the problem in data coverage and quality and strengthening Human Development Statistics Net.

4. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: FROM CONCEPT TO MEASUREMENT

a. Human Development|: from concept to measurement by Timothy Scott, UNDP/HDR0

Mr. Scott looked into the concept of human development which is concerned with putting people in the center of development, and how this concept is linked with other approaches such as economic growth and MDGs. He said that human development approach identifies a set of goals we wish to achieve, as well as a holistic, multi-disciplinary, action-oriented approach for achieving them within every country context. Human development is characterized by a focus on issues of equity, efficiency, empowerment and participation, particularly of marginalized groups, and environmental sustainability. He also explained that human development data is key to evidence-based policy- making processes, and reliance on such data also ensure more transparent, accountable and participatory political and governance processes.

5. COMPOSITE INDICES: DATA SOURCES, USES, LIMITATIONS

a. Explanation of the HD indices by Alison Kennedy, UNDP/HDR0

Ms. Kennedy spoke about the dimensions of human development being health and education, access to basic services and resources as well as freedom to speak and take part in decision-making. She addressed the family of human development indices and the indicators associated thereto. These include Human Development Index (HDI), Human Poverty Index (HPI), Gender-related Development Index (GDI), and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). She also talked about the weights of indicators and said that the dimensions in each index are weighted equally, and that is not by chance but rather reflect a belief that all dimensions indicators are equally important.

b. International data sources by Said Belkachla, UNESCO/UIS

Mr. Belkachla made a brief intervention on the contribution of education indicators to the human development indices being the adult illiteracy rate and combined gross enrolment ratio. He discussed the sources of these indicators namely the national statistical offices and ministry of education in countries for enrollment and literacy data, and UN population division estimates for population data. He also proposed alternative indicators, which can be used to supplement the human development indices. such as public expenditure on education as percent of GDP, internet users, educational attainment/completion, daily newspapers circulation, and gross outbound enrollment ratio (mobile students)

PLENARY RESPONSES

The following are the key issues that were raised during the plenary discussions:

- How we can adapt the different indicators of human development indices in GCC countries, given the specificity of the region (such as poverty, culture and attitudes toward women..)
- How we address the issue of population estimates in GCC countries, knowing that the region is characterized by high proportion of migrant workers. And how this can affect the calculation of HD indices
- How we can reconcile between data collected and the actual quality of the data
- There is a need to collect both quantitative and qualitative data as well
- It is not possible to address the region issues at the global level (HDR) but it is likely that this can be achieved at the regional and national contexts. We can make use of the issues of the global reports and attempt to analyze further the circumstances and explore the results at the national context.
- HD indices should be disaggregated by nationals/non-nationals to address the issue of migrant workers
- There is a problem in data quality and coverage and countries are requested to conduct periodic surveys to provide timely and accurate data to UN system for proper calculation of indices

6. DATA ISSUES: QUALITY, SOURCES, GAPS

a. Challenges in the region by Zeinab Khader, AUC

Ms. Khader started her presentation with a brief history about global and regional human development reports. The Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) series has become a milestone in the broader debate over the development reform agenda in the Arab region, and its recommendations are increasingly reflected in development programming at the national and regional levels. Currently UNDP/RBAS is sponsoring a second generation of Arab Human Development Reports, which will independently analyze and monitor trends and issues affecting human development in the Arab world. The theme for the first of these reports was selected to be the Human security. The second part of her presentation addressed the data issues and problems in these reports which can be summarized as follows

- The timing and time lag in reported statistics
- Inconsistency between national and international sources. Governments complain and data are contested with other national sources. Hence the urgent need for proper communication and coordination between national and international data agencies
- Inconsistency and in coherence in international data series: Differences in data sources; timing of updates; duplication of data production effort; and variation in the definition of some indicators
- Incomplete and missing data from national and international sources.

b. National experience by Sultan Al-Kuwari, QSA

Mr Al-Kuwari presented the efforts of Qatar in preparing HD indicators, the outcome of which was the establishment of a Steering Committee consisting of representatives from the national statistical office and different government ministries. The Committee' objectives were primarily to ensure that national HD indicators are reported in accordance with UN standards and definitions, and to develop a time table for the timely response to all data requests from UN agencies. He said that one of the main achievements of the Committee is the development of an action plan to fill the data gaps and to establish a mechanism of collaboration between the national statistical office and international agencies working on HD indicators.

7. STANDARDIZATION: NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

a. International data collection and production processes explained by Said Belkachla, UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Mr. Said Belkachla talked about the UIS data gathering mechanisms for education, and the time table between when the data is collected and released. He explained how UIS makes sure that data is comparable by applying ISCED to classify countries' programme and ensure that all educational institutions and groups are included in the data. He, then, gave a brief overview on the procedures of data processing at UIS which starts by data cleaning, then estimation (in case of missing data) and finally a review by country and agency. The main challenge, he said, is to ensure that data is timely, and that UIS has overcome this matter through a rolling data collection process and release.

b. International data collection and production processes explained by Olivier Dupriez, World Bank

Mr. Dupriez explained World Bank Contribution to the Human Development Index (HDI) by looking at the different economic component of HDI namely GDP and Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) as well as the associated limitations in using these indicators. He concluded that there may be errors in the calculation of GDP due to population sizes as well as in the estimation of PPPs, and that users are ought to be cautious about making comparisons over time and across countries.

8. INTRODUCTION TO THE SUB-REGIONAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT

a. Background, proposed theme(s), timeline, main actors, data needs and issues by GCC representative

Mr. Mohamed Shelwah gave a presentation on the upcoming sub-regional HDR which will be coordinated between UNDP and GCC Secretariat. He said that the report will be prepared by independent consultants and that data will be based mainly on national sources while respecting international concepts and definitions. The report will deal with the theme of sustainable development and will tackle economical, social and environmental issues from that angle.

b. Other regional/national reports by Mostefa Al-Sayed, Cairo University

Mr. Mostefa Al-Sayed outlined the structure and content of the AHDR which will focus on the theme of human security. The report consists of nine chapters focusing on different aspects of human security namely environment, food, health, political, personal and community security. He introduced the concept of human security and explained its close relationship to human development, and said that human development cannot be reached unless people are free from fear and need.

Two cases studies on the preparation of national HDR were submitted by Mr. Abdelkader Al-Mesawi from United Arab Emirates and Ms. Mariam Maysoon Al-Hajiri from Oman.

PLENARY SESSIONS

The following points were raised during the plenary discussions:

- User producer dialogue is a continuous process and should be encouraged at all levels
- The role of a national coordinator within the country has been emphasized. The coordinator will be responsible to coordinate between the national agency and the UN organization working on the data. In that context, it was suggested that the UN organizations should synchronize their efforts to send their questionnaires in order to minimize the burden on countries
- With respect to the sub-regional HDR, it was recommended that the data although coming from national sources, should follow international guidelines in the calculation of HD indices. It was also suggested that the report should not present data that is different from other HD reports.
- The significance of the data quality and availability for decision making and evidence base policy was further reinforced

9. Cross-cutting issues

The participants were sub-divided into two working groups to address cross-cutting issues namely water management, labor market, gender and governance.

a. Water management by Hosny Khordagui, ESCWA and Hassan Al-Mohanadi, Permanent Population Committee (PPC)

The presentation of Mr. Khordagui had two main objectives: to present the state of water in the ESCWA region; and to address problems in primary water data and indicators. Mr. Khordagui said that the region is one of the most arid areas of the World and that one of the main problems in managing water relates to insufficiency of water statistics for proper management, and the poor monitoring, reporting, sharing & dissemination of water quality & quantity data. He explained that water indicators in the region are not adequately, routinely or publicly reported by most governments, and even by most international & regional development organizations. The main reasons behind that is the generation of primary water data is a highly technical process involving qualified & well-trained technicians, and the operational and capital costs associated with it are quite high. Another cause, he explained, is that a large part of primary water data suffers from significant quality uncertainty and often lack comparability. Water data is not disclosed, shared or reported due to political, economical and personal reasons. In other words, data if not properly reported, if not poorly disseminated, or interpreted, it is not properly used for effective decision making.

Later, Mr. Hassan Al-Mohannadi addressed the status of water in the GCC region. His presentation focused on the current water resources in the GCC countries, the demand on water and its uses (surface and ground water), the challenges in water resources, and finally the strategy needed to overcome them. He explained that the region lacks a long term strategy for managing water resources, and the GCC countries often don't have mechanisms as well as the institutional regulation for proper control of water.

b. Labor markets by Bassem Serhan/Samih Boustani, GSDP

Both experts discussed the major issues that confront labor markets in the GCC countries and their demographic consequences. The main points that were raised in the presentation:

- The impact of expatriate labor on population structure in the GCC countries in terms of age and sex composition as well as in terms of turning GCC nationals into demographics minorities.
- The challenge of human capital development among GCC nationals
- Enhancing the participation of GCC females in the labor force
- The newly arising unemployment among GCC nationals

The experts also addressed the challenges of providing pertinent and accurate data for each of the above issues and called for regular statistical surveys of labor markets and population.

c. Gender by Ahmad Hussein, QSA

Mr. Hussein discussed the gender dimension in the human development and the related indices of Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and Gender Development Index (GDI). He also touched upon the limitations of each index in terms of measuring gender equality, and talked about the importance of gender budgeting in taking into consideration the socially determined gender roles & responsibilities.

d. Governance & participation in decision-making, by Mostafa Al-Sayyed, University of Cairo

Mr. Mostafa Al-Sayed made a presentation of meaning of governance in the region. He explained that art of governance is the style of the governance disposition of the limited resources that are owned by the community, which control of these resources, whatever these resources are and whatever this authority is (central authority, local authority, the leadership of the civil society and management of projects or companies) and outlined the different elements of good governance.

10. ADVOCATING WITH DATA

a. Influencing policy: use in dissemination and outreach strategy by Noeman Al Sayyad, UNDP Cairo

This subject was addressed by Mr. Noeman Al-Sayyad from UNDP Egypt. His presentation stressed the importance of links between human development data and “advocacy” activities in order to maximize impact (proposing a wider model of Communication for Development). He proposed opportunities for such links throughout the data production and reporting process; and presented examples of how such links have been established and capitalized on in select cases related to data/HDR advocacy.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of the workshop, participants (in groups or as individuals) had a number of recommendations, and the organizers have reviewed and summarized to come up with the following:

A- Addressed to countries

- Conduct household surveys or field studies to provide indicators needed for national, international and regional organizations;
- Appoint national coordinators to liaise with international organizations with regard to the data gathering needs (questionnaire);
- Develop an index to measure the social cost of development on the population
- Make use of national, regional and global HDR in order to identify data gaps and policy interventions needed
- Provide international organizations with the methodologies and meta-data of the data that are compiled
- Encourage more networking among countries in the GCC region to follow up workshops, and exchange experience in preparing HDR and related indicators.
- Given that the population figures are used to calculate human development indices, countries are encouraged to provide the UN Population Division/DESA with the available national population estimates to enable the Division prepare reliable estimates and projections for the region.

B- Addressed to international organizations

- Provide GCC Secretariat with a full list of questionnaires/data requests to be sent to countries for their completion
- Use governance indicators in global HDR
- Strengthen the role of UNDP in communicating with other international organizations & countries in the preparation of HDR

- Request to have additional guidelines on definitions & calculation of indicators which are included in the Global HDR
- Encourage use of national statistics in the calculation of HD indicators

C- Addressed to GCC/ESCWA/ UNDP country offices

- Develop a range of indicators to address specific needs of the region (e.g. migrant workers, human rights)
- Create a list of national HDRs and regional HDR/MDGs reports and others, which are produced in the region
- Take account of advocacy at the beginning of the process to prepare a national or regional report (including its budget)

D- Future workshops

- Bilateral meetings with international organizations outside the main meeting have proven to be very helpful
- More sessions on the detailed methods of calculating indicators with examples
- More workshops on the preparation of HDRs involving statisticians and other GCC experts
- More workshops on gender issues and indicators
- Involve experts from outside region to share regional and international experience have been helpful.

The workshop was adjourned on Wednesday 23 January at 14.00.