



P21-SC1-08-VSS

PARIS21 Steering Committee Meeting

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9 rue de la Fédération, 75015 Paris*

Project Proposal

Virtual Statistical System

May 2008

Preface

This proposal has been developed by a Task Team composed of representatives of the Central Statistical Office of India, the Development Gateway Foundation, the Federal Statistical Office Germany, EUROSTAT, Ghana Statistical Services, the International Monetary Fund, PARIS21, the United Nations Statistics Division, and the World Bank under the terms of reference approved by PARIS21. These representatives convened in a meeting on the PARIS21 Task Team on the Virtual Statistical System, held in Washington, DC on March 11-13, 2008¹. The following are discussion points to be considered by the PARIS21 Steering Committee:

- (1) Does the Committee agree on the work plan of the Virtual Statistical System Task Team proposed in this document; and
- (2) Does the Committee agree to allocate the required resources?

Executive summary

This is a project proposal to develop a website that will assist developing countries in their statistical capacity building work. The name “Virtual Statistical System” is used, because the concept is to present information to support the development of statistical systems using virtual methods.

It is proposed that the development of the website takes place under the umbrella of a Paris 21 Task Team, for which the convener is the World Bank, working in close cooperation with the UN Statistics Division and other members of the Task Team. Representatives of national statistical offices as recipients and providers of statistical know how will also be involved in the work. Once the site is developed, it is proposed that implementation and management of the site will be either the responsibility of UN Statistics Division or the responsibility shared among a group of partners. The estimated cost of site development is around US\$430,000, excluding translation into languages other than English, for the period of 24 months, of which US\$80,000 has been made available for the testing of the website with potential users.

It is proposed that the website will be developed in a modular fashion, with a pilot phase. The preliminary design indicates that there will need to be over 50 modules; 5 modules will be developed in the pilot phase. Each module will have 7 cells, or sub-modules, containing around one to two pages of basic information, with links to additional information as appropriate. The user interface will include interactive functions that will facilitate the retrieval of information. In the development of the website, attention will be paid to the possibility of posting documents in languages in which they are available.

Implementation of this proposal will require a partnership effort of international and national agencies for a period of 24 months.

¹ A list of meeting participants is provided in Annex 1.

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1. Introduction

Many developing countries are in need of information to support their statistical capacity building efforts. This proposal is a coordinated effort to meet these information needs and aims to create a tailor-made interactive statistical knowledge website. It is intended to explain the objectives of this project, the approach, the ownership, resources and management needed, the timeframe and milestones, the activities of the Task Team and its outputs, the budget, the sustainability and risks, the monitoring and evaluation processes, and the promotion and marketing of the site. The proposal is based on several assumptions, including: developing countries have information needs that can be pre-defined, to some extent; that they are interested and able to use the internet (or other electronic media) as a source of knowledge; and that they can define their needs and that they have the absorption capacity to utilize the information provided.

The approach taken is, however, not just about presenting information. The website will also be a communication tool. It will be able to receive requests and to present answers to those requests. One of the advantages of this site is also the promotion of a common statistical language, including information on the knowledge needed to produce official statistics, and how that information can be applied.

The method of communication will be innovative and cost effective. The site will consist of three layers of information. The first layer (A) will contain all the information that is directly available through the structure and content of the site. The second layer (B) will direct users to all the information that can be obtained from other websites. The third layer (C) will include interactive processes, such as a "question and answer" search function, where countries can ask questions and others will be invited to provide answers that are reviewed by those institutions that have responsibility for the respective domain. The importance of this third layer will depend on the extent to which the first two layers are capable of serving users.

The design of the site is crucially dependent on its structure and basic content. At present the proposal is to base the site on a) structured activities and b) structured themes, with added functionality (e.g. "click" and "search" functions). The approach implies the creation of modules, which are coherent sets of information that deal with major issues relevant to that topic. "Content" is also needed; content is the total set of information about the topic, the methods applied, training, tools and other relevant information. The structure will guide the user to the content, and the content will guide the user to other information sources outside of the domain of the website. Information providers direct content or external links. These and other potential data providers will be invited to participate in the use of the communication tools, for instance, by providing answers to users' questions or by providing links.

The site, specifically the structure and content, will be developed by the PARIS21 Task Team. Two working modalities are proposed.

The first modality is a centralized approach. There will be close cooperation between the WB and the UNSD; UNSD is intended to be the host organization for this site once the site is developed and should therefore be one of the leading partners in the Task Team. The main supporting partner will be the Development Gateway Foundation, which will assist in web design. Other members of the team will give support and advice on a regular basis, and will provide oversight to the development process. The initial phase of development is expected to be finished by mid-2010, with daily management of the site by UNSD, to start in the second half of 2009.

The second modality is a decentralized approach. In this approach, there will not be a central host for the website and the content of the website will be split up into a number of domains. For each of these domains, domain managers, belonging to different national statistical agencies and international organizations, will be appointed and will be in charge of the content of the domain. In addition, an international working group or steering committee, to which these domain managers will report, can be formed. The IT support will be provided by a central function/organization. The development of the site can be done in a decentralized manner through a similar process.

2. Objectives, targeted users and measures of success (what and why)

The Virtual Statistical System is about statistical systems (i.e. more than a statistical office). The system will present information on all production units for official statistics in a country, and will include the institutional framework and the user community. The word “virtual” refers to a situation where you can visit organizations and meet people – who are not real but displays the qualities of being real - who can provide relevant information.

2.1 Objectives

The objectives can be divided into WHAT, WHY and HOW.

WHAT

The VSS will function as a knowledge center that takes into account the information needs of different user types, with information available from basic levels through to advanced and expert levels. The information presented will focus on the development of statistical systems.

WHY

The VSS will be a tool that supports the preparation and implementation of National Strategies for the Development of Statistics, by providing all relevant information. It will support national efforts to design, build and maintain national statistical systems.

HOW

It will be implemented through a user-friendly IT platform that provides relevant information for targeted users. The site will promote standards and the sharing of country practices. Standardized and structured information will form the core. Where possible the site will provide access to relevant training resources and access to statistical tools.

2.2 Targeted users

The targeted users are the statisticians in developing countries, in national statistical agencies, central banks, and line ministries. It is also expected that technical assistance providers will benefit from this information, as well as training centers and students in statistics. In order to ensure strict user orientation the targeted institutions will be asked prior to the design of the website which kind of information and services they expect to gain from the website. This survey of potential users will help to prioritize the steps of work and focus the first steps of work on content and areas which are in great demand and easily accessible.

2.3 Measures of success

Website statistics will be developed to measure success, including indicators like the amount of information provided (documents, links), the number of repeat users and other information on usage. A users survey may also be implemented including questions such as:

- Can users find what they need to know?
- Was the information found relevant?
- Can users find information easily?
- Could users use the website successfully?
- Was the quality of information sufficient?

3. Proposed approach

In order to achieve the above objectives, it is proposed that a portal be created to serve as an entry point for accessing well-structured information on how to improve statistical systems and how to use statistics. The portal will be based on a modular approach, and users can get basic information from the portal, as well as more detailed information by following links to other sources of information, depending on their needs. The aim here is to create a generic and harmonized system which is self-explanatory and keeps the system simple.

3.1 Portal

The portal will be a well structured site, with a detailed sitemap and instructions to use the portal. It will be self sufficient for basic information and provide a roadmap to more detailed references.

The portal will be kept as simple as possible. The best way to achieve this is to create clear structures and to make the information on the portal standardized and generic to the extent possible, to avoid frequent updating. Information providers are expected to provide links to information that will not need to be updated often.

3.2 Structure

A structured approach that categorizes information into activities and themes has been agreed by the Task Team.

- Activities. The activity based approach uses typical general practices in statistical offices as a way to understand the overall processes of production, dissemination and use of statistics. In this approach, statistical work is categorized into the main activities that are core business of statistics producing organization. The main activity categories need to be discussed further and agreed upon.
- Themes. The theme based approach takes account of the perspectives of thematically oriented users. The themes can be seen as the subject matter on which data are produced. They can be organized around the UNECE/EUROSTAT/OECD classification of statistical activities, with adaptation to the VSS needs. The content includes the description of the theme, standards, methods, training (resources and e-learning), tools, country practices and outputs/indicators, presented using different tabs.

The structure will be described in more detail in the project document, which is one of the deliverables of the project.

3.3 Modular approach

The website will be constructed based on a modular approach. This means that both the activities and the themes will be broken down into a number of modules. A module is a harmonized set of information that is sufficient to understand that topic. The main module can be further broken down into sub modules or “cells”.

It is estimated that the activities will have about 7 – 8 modules, with about 50 sub-modules, and themes there will have about 45 modules, with a total of about 200 sub-modules. This implies that the portal will consist of about 250 cells to be filled with information, equivalent to 250 (up to 500) pages of a text document. In order to harmonize the information presented, templates will be prepared as part of the deliverables during the project design phase.

3.4 Level of detail

The level of detail of the site needs to be discussed in the development phase and will be demonstrated in the development of pilot exercises for some themes and some activities.

3.5 Interactive function

One of the important features of the portal is an interactive function, such as a Q and A function attached to each module. Answers to questions from countries can be prepared by partners who are involved in the area, and will be provided to countries once the quality of the partners’ responses is reviewed by a webmaster. It is expected that this tool will help furnish countries with access the information they seek but is currently not available for them, or which may require excessive amount of time to search, access and interpret. Different approaches will be used to provide answers to the questions asked.

The Q and A is therefore an essential part of the proposal and requires substantial support from partners for this to function. Detailed arrangements are still to be discussed.

3.6 Interfaces

This section will be formulated later as part of the project implementation.

4. Ownership, governance and project management

The project is designed to be developed in three phases:

- In Phase 1 the proposal will be developed and written;
- In Phase 2 the portal will be developed and implemented;
 - o Phase 2A: the structure of the site will be completed;
 - o Phase 2B: websites will be developed;
 - o Phase 2C: the pilot modules will be created;
 - o Phase 2D: the basic information will be provided;
 - o Phase 2E the modules will be completed; and
- In Phase 3 the portal will be maintained.

Phase 1

The project was originally proposed by the World Bank, which has been serving as the convener of the Task Team. This proposal was drafted by the World Bank, in close coordination with the UNSD, based on the discussions that took place during the Task Team’s first meeting in Washington, DC in March 2008 (the discussion summary and list of participants are provided in the Annex).

Phase 2

During Phase 2, which is expected to last for 24 months, the World Bank and the UNSD will jointly play the leadership role for the work of the Task Team, with the World Bank as Convener in close cooperation with other partner agencies. The PARIS 21 Task Team will serve as the oversight body and the Task Team convener will be responsible for reporting to the PARIS21 Steering Committee. The Development Gateway Foundation will assist in designing the portal in close cooperation with the UNSD.

Once the structure of the portal has been constructed (Phase 2A) separate project teams will work on the creation of a set of different selected modules. During Phase 2B, the World Bank and the UNSD will start identifying agencies that can contribute to the development of the portal by providing content in the future. During Phase 2C, the pilot-modules will be created and experts will be hired to assist in that process, as necessary. During Phases 2D and 2E, larger scale exercises will be undertaken to collect information from potential providers (countries and international agencies) and to upload it onto the portal.

The Task Team activities will be completed at the completion of Phase 2.

Phase 3

During or after completion of Phase 2, it is proposed that the website will be transferred to the UNSD, which will host it and have its custodianship. In Phase 3, the focus will be on ongoing maintenance and expansion of the content. During the transition from Phase 2 to Phase 3, an IAEG (Inter-Agency Expert Group) will be created with a mandate to advise and comment on the products and the work completed as part of the project.

With regard to ownership, a centralized or a decentralized approach may be taken. With the centralized approach, the site may be handed over to the UNSD and may be implemented as part of the UNSD website with full ownership transferred to the UNSD. The Task Team can then be considered as the deliverer of a product that will be accepted by the UNSD to be further used and maintained by UNSD. Consequently, the UNSD will need to ensure that the product can fit into its website system.

If a decentralized approach is taken, a group of contributing international agencies and countries can agree to have a shared ownership and take the responsibility to improve and maintain certain domains of the site.

5. Human Resource Requirements

It is estimated that the following human resources are required for the Task Team work during Phase 2:

- A project coordinator: 1 person for at least 24 months who will be based at the World Bank;
- A consultant supporting the coordinator: 1 person for at least 24 months;
- A web developer: 0.5 persons for one year;
- Content coordinators: a group of partners who oversee the content development of a specific domain; and
- A review group: a group of partners who will review the materials developed for the modules or domains.

In addition, content providers will be required to research what materials are available, solicit relevant documents, prepare summaries for activities/themes, (modules and sub-modules) and produce links. Content providers can be agencies or countries which are willing to contribute and have the appropriate expertise. Given that 250 to 500 pages of documents with links are to be created (see section 3.3) and if the modules cannot be developed by partner agencies/counties, it is estimated that 1 expert for 18 months will be required to complete the content.

A timeframe for the various tasks is presented in the annex.

6. List of planned activities of the Task Team/outcomes

The planned activities/outcomes of the Task Team and their expected dates are as follows:

1. Design a full project plan with templates	October 2008
2. Test the approach with potential users	October/December 2008 ²
3. Design the website with all its functions and make it operational	February 2009
4. Create 5 pilot Modules	February 2009
5. Conduct testing	July 2009
6. 20% of the Modules completed	July 2009
7 (a). Centralized approach: Transfer the site to the UNSD OR 7 (b) Decentralized approach: No action is required	December 2009, OR Not applicable
8. 60% of the Modules completed	February 2010
9. 100% of the modules completed	July 2010
10. Completion of Task Team activities	December 2010 / March 2011
11. Feedback and evaluations	Throughout Phase 2

It can be contemplated in the development process and the future additional functions are created, like a marketplace function with information on the demand and supply of SCB activities and a set of geographic maps of countries. The ideas of the Statistical Federal Office of Germany to use a facebook approach will be examined.

7. Sustainability and Risks

7.1 Sustainability

In order to ensure sustainability of the project, the following actions are proposed:

- *Identify host organization.* It is desirable that the UNSD be the host.
- *Secure resources.* Sufficient resources are required to create the minimum version of the VSS.
- *Involve countries and development partners actively.* The project design is conducive to cooperation among countries and development partners.

² In-depth discussions are planned with selected users to adapt the VSS to their needs. This component will be funded by the Development Gateway Foundation.

- *Assign responsibilities to partners.* In the phase of the creation of modules, partners will be asked take responsibilities for the modules based on their interest and expertise.
- *Define governance arrangement.* In Phase 2, the task team work will jointly be led by the World Bank and the UNSD. In Phase 3, the UNSD will assume the responsibility of being the host of the portal.
- *Keep the first layer information generic.* The information in most of the VSS cells should be generic and should not be subject to frequent updates.
- *Coordinate with SDMX.* There will be alignment with the SDMX to the extent possible.

7.2 Risks

Potential risks associated with the content producers, development partners and users, and proposed mitigation measures to be taken, are indicated below.

Potential risks	Mitigation measures
Development partners are not willing to support.	Promotion and advocacy targeted specifically to development partners.
Users can not use the portal due to limited internet accessibility.	The site can be put on CD and even be transformed into a publication.
<i>Risks phase 2</i>	
Lack of cooperation between the partners.	The UNSD and the World Bank will jointly play the leadership role and promote a culture of consensus based decision making among the agencies involved.
Lack of financing.	Each year the convener will report to PARIS21 and identify and seek sources for additional funding.
Lack of skills involved among participating entities.	Consultants are expected to be hired to support and step in as necessary.
Portal does not get completed or launched.	The loss would be limited to the investment in the website and the content will remain useful and available for use.

8. Timeframe and milestones

The project needs to be planned and implemented in a realistic time frame. The following timeline is proposed.

8.1 Detailed Time frame

Year	Month	Activity
2008	End March	Draft proposal prepared
	May 19	Final proposal to be presented to P21 SC
	June	P21 SC decisions
	September/October	Phase 2 starts
	October/December	Testing with potential users
2009	Jan	Completion of a full web structure
	February	Completion of 4-5 pilot modules
	July	Release 1 : 20% of the modules completed
		User feedback
	August	ISI presentation
	December	Transfer to UNSD
2010	February	Release 2 : 60% of the modules completed
		User feedback
	July	Release 3 : 100% of the modules completed
		User feedback
	November	Final version of the portal completed
	December	Project completed

8.2 UN related milestones

- November 2008: A paragraph in the Statistical Capacity Building Paper for UN Statistical Commission by UNSD
- A description of the VSS Task Team in P21 paper for UNSC
- Letter from Paul Cheung to invite countries to contribute
- February 2009: UN Statistical Commission side event

8.3 Language issues

English will be the primary language. Reference and other material resources will be accessed in the languages available on the institutional websites. The content can optionally be translated into 6 UN languages at additional cost. The regional development banks may be approached for funding of the translations.

9. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring will be done on the basis of an agreed work plan. During the phase of the design and development a feedback process will be organized. This will be done through testing (in-depth feedback) and corrective actions taken.

For the feedback, aspects to be considered include:

- Development of user feedback
- Inclusion of users in the task team
- Selection of users for in-depth feedback (2 countries)
- Conducting user feedback groups meetings (face-to-face or virtually)
- Creation of user reference groups (5-6 countries)
- Conducting user surveys

- Creating a hotline to compile user feedback
- Evaluation of user feedback
- Incorporation of recommendations by the Task Team.

10. Promotion and marketing

A promotion and marketing plan will be developed. This will be aimed at potential donors and the targeted users.

11. Budget

The estimated cost to design and manage the portal based on this proposal is US\$430,000 for a period of 24 months, which includes consultant fees for the website development, management, coordination, evaluation, and promotion and marketing. US\$80,000 has already been made available for the testing of the website with potential users

A detailed budget is provided in the Annex 2.

12. Recommendations

1. The development of a Virtual Statistical System, using the portal approach outlined in this paper, should be approved.
2. The PARIS21 Task Team should take the lead responsibility for the design and development of the VSS
3. After the conceptual work is done, a testing period will be used to get feedback from potential users. The budget of the Development Gateway Foundation will be used for that purpose,
4. A modular approach should be taken to the development of the VSS, with incremental releases as outlined in the paper.
5. A budget of US\$350,000 should be approved for the development of the VSS. It should be noted that the ongoing maintenance costs would require an additional budget.
6. The UNSD, with the assistance of the Task Team, should issue invitations to international agencies and/or National Statistical Offices to undertake responsibility for the development of the modules. The work of the contributors may need to be supplemented with a budget to hire consultants.
7. The information on the website (but not the linked documents) should be translated into the 6 official UN languages (at an estimated cost of 100 days x \$300 = US\$30,000 per language). These costs are presently not part of the budget.
8. The timetable and milestones for the development of the VSS should be followed as set out in section 7.
9. The governance arrangements should be:

- (a) The PARIS 21 Task Team will take responsibility for the development of the project and its strategic direction.
- (b) If Modality 1, the centralized approach, is chosen, the project will be jointly led by the UNSD and the World Bank until the completion of Phase 2 over a period of about 24 months. If Modality 2, the decentralized approach, is selected, the project will be coordinated by the World Bank and partners will rely on virtual ways to work together during Phase 2.
- (c) The convener of the task team will be the World Bank. The Task Team convener will be responsible for the management of the project. A Project Coordinator, will be appointed when this is considered to be appropriate.
- (d) The Project Coordinator will provide regular reports to the Task Team, which will, in turn, provide reports on progress and issues for the regular meetings of the PARIS21 Steering Committee.
- (e) Feedback from the users targeted should be obtained during the early stage of development of VSS.

Annexes:

Annex 1: Participants to the 1st Meeting of the Paris 21 Task Team in Washington, DC, on March 11-13, 2008

P21 Task Team Meeting on Virtual Statistical System

Participants		
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Annex 2: Estimated budget:

Task	Budget	Partner	Output
Testing of the proposal	80,000	DGF	The budget has already been secured and is not part of the request for financial support.
Website design	75,000	WB and UNSD	Design
Project design		WB and UNSD	Final web proposal
Pilot modules	20,000	Consultants	Modules
Preparation of content of modules		International organizations/ selected countries	Modules, 1 st layer of content.
Rest of content of Modules	181,000	Consultants	Modules, 2 nd layer of content.
Testing	PM	Consultant	Test-report
Management/ coordination/ support	65,000	Supporting Consultant	Daily Management
Promotion and marketing	6,000	Consultants	Materials
Evaluation	3,000	Consultant	Evaluation report
In Reserve for traveling, meetings	PM	various	
Total Budget	430,000		
Request for financial support	350,000		