

DRAFT Discussion Document: Options for Integrating the Virtual Statistical System into Training Programs of Regional Training Institutes

VSS Secretariat, World Bank

Summary

The content of the Virtual Statistical System (VSS) is sufficiently advanced to provide both reference and training materials to improve staff skills in developing country statistical offices. This concept note suggests an approach towards integrating the VSS materials into the curricula of regional training centers involved in statistical capacity building, and in providing a common method to training and eLearning globally.

As a first step, integration of the VSS into existing curricula would be piloted in a select number of regional institutes. This would allow for the contents of the VSS to be tested before broadening the number of participating centers and providing an accreditation to trainees backed by the VSS's sponsoring agencies. Moreover, based on these experiences the content of the VSS could also be adjusted.

Adopting a Phased Wholesale Approach to leverage the VSS's impact

In many developing countries, improvements in national statistical systems are impeded by readily accessible information on work flow processes, critical standards and methodologies, concepts and definitions. The Virtual Statistical System (VSS) was created to help fill this knowledge gap by providing access to an array of reference materials, e-learning courses, and links to other resources.

This paper proposes pursuing a “wholesale” approach to aid capacity building. Specifically, regional training institutes would integrate VSS materials and modules into their curricula and offerings. This approach would improve the consistency of training received across regions, yet allow institutes to customize their offerings to local circumstances. Partnerships between the international content providers and selected regional training institutes would be formed. These partnerships would vary with each institute depending on their training objectives and preferences. For example, regional training institutes may want to be completely independent and use the VSS's training materials in any way they wish. Other partners could work in close collaboration with international organizations to develop training program specifics.

The wholesale approach will be implemented in two phases. In Phase One, the “pilot” phase, three or four training institutes would be selected to pilot the wholesale approach. In the second phase, the program would be scaled up by expanding the approach to more training institutes and specific NSOs with in-house training capacity.

Phase One: Piloting and learning

During Phase One (would last about one year), the VSS would be integrated into the training offerings of two to four regional training institutes to assess how the VSS can be used under formal training conditions. To participate in the pilot, training institutes would have to have some form of ongoing training in statistics and training plans in place (i.e. existence of training objectives, established curriculum, materials, exercises and modes of delivery). Topics would cover both management / business process topics and subject matter topics. The VSS secretariat, in partnership with other sponsoring international organizations, would help participating institutions incorporate the VSS eLearning tools and reference materials into their curricula. Thus, the pilot phase would aim to assess the following:

- The applicability of the VSS in its current state to support statistical training activities.
- Determine the gaps in coverage and/or quality of the VSS content that would require correction with the aspirational objective of providing accredited training in statistics.
- The effectiveness of the VSS secretariat in coordinating support for the pilot

The pilot would test two of the existing VSS materials under two scenarios:

- Incorporate the VSS content into existing training programs and courses, where appropriate.* The amount of materials from the VSS being incorporated into existing courses will depend on the match between the topics covered by the curriculum of the training institute and the VSS.
- Test the effectiveness of specific VSS eLearning courses.* It is suggested to start with the existing “Management of Statistical Systems” course, possibly complemented with additional courses, one of which could be the course on the Project management of statistical surveys. A three week VSS course could include selected lessons from at least five of the 10 modules.

Under both parts, students would be expected to register for that course and the course would be delivered by the partner institutes, possibly in cooperation with the donors. Donors, through the VSS secretariat, would advise on the design of that course, assist with the completion of the course materials and (if requested) assist with delivering it. Such a course could also be delivered as a “*training of the trainers’ course*” the perspective to train trainers that can multiply the knowledge about the VSS in their home countries.

The pilot phase could also test VSS delivery mechanisms: a) through the traditional classroom settings, where the VSS is used in face to face training situations, b) A student-centered self-paced approach. The primary “donor” contact points of the pilot phase would be World Bank staff who already have close working arrangements in the region in which the pilot institute is located. For the pilot phase, World Bank staff would act as a central resource in regards to identifying and coordinating revisions to VSS training and reference materials in close collaboration with other VSS content providers.

To deliver the VSS courses, the training institutes would identify the key staff members responsible for the pilot and willing to become familiar with the VSS. It may be possible to support pilot institutes

entering into a partnership to use the VSS with small grants as an incentive to participate. A list of potential training topics is described in Annex I. Potential partners for Phase One are:

- i) Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), in Mexico: Already engaged in reviewing the VSS's potential to provide training and reference materials support capacity building in the Latin American Region.
- ii) EASTC (Tanzania): This institute is located on the premises of the University of Dar es Salaam and has a great potential to serve countries in the region. As a first step, training priorities are being identified by the Tanzanian NSO that would likely be delivered through the EASTC. The VSS content in these priority areas is being reviewed for quality, relevance, and completeness.
- iii) University of the West Indies: This University is located in the Caribbean and has a great potential to serve the island states in the region. Initial discussions are underway to identify modalities.
- iv) SIAP (Tokyo, Japan): This institute has a well developed training program and serves already many countries in the region and in Africa. In this case the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (New Caledonia), Statistics for Development might be included in some way.
- v) Makerere University (Uganda): This institute has a good name as a regional training center in statistics in Africa.
- vi) The Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (Jordan).

Phase Two: Scaling up

Once the pilot phase is complete, the experience of working participating training institutes would be evaluated. The evaluation's findings would be reflected in a broader roll out to other training institutes and/or NSOs with established training programs. In phase two, one could begin developing a "training the trainers" program along with the options developed under phase one.

Annex 1: Topics on the VSS eLearning

- Management of Statistical Systems
- Project Management of Statistical Surveys
- GIS
- Labor Statistics and Survey Design
- Justice, Security and Crime Statistics
- Quality Assurance of the Census
- Agriculture Statistics
- Business Statistics and Business Register
- System of National Accounts (intro)
- System of National Accounts (advanced)
- Government Finance Statistics
- How to use the VSS.