Ref: ECA/SRO-WA/MR/2015/02

MISSION REPORT

Objective: To participate in the second National Workshop of the Gambia pilot in the framework of the DA project "Strengthening the capacity of African countries to use mobile technologies to collect data for effective policy and decision making"

Location and time: 12-14 February 2015 at Biljo (The Gambia)

Chargé de mission: Zacharias Ziegelhöfer, SRO-WA

Context and objective of mission

The timely provision of quality data is a great challenge for National Statistical Offices (NSO) in Africa which have to cope with financial constraints and a low technology base alongside with other factors. Currently, most African national statistical systems use manual, paper-based data collection methods for specialized surveys, which provide the bulk of statistical data. Paper-based methods involve printing of the paper questionnaires, transporting them across to the fieldworkers, and getting them back to a central location. The lengthy processes not only delay the production of data for decision making, but also require a lot of personnel for data collection and capture, thereby exacerbating the financial constraints. Computer assisted interviewing (CAI) methods can provide remedy to the above-mentioned challenges and are increasingly replacing pen-and-paper methods of survey data collection.

The Development Account (DA) project of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) "Strengthening the capacity of African countries to use mobile technologies to collect data for effective policy and decision making" provides financing of US$1,845,000 for the implementation of five pilot projects in the respective five sub-regions of the ECA in addition to a sixth pilot project in Ethiopia, which is financed by the Irish Government. The project aims at enabling the NSOs of the pilot countries, in partnership with Training and Research Institutions (TRIs), to use and develop further technological solutions for cell-phone based data collection.

For the West African Sub-Region, The Gambia has been chosen as a pilot country. The other pilot countries include Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tunisia and Zimbabwe. The Ethiopia project serves as a pilot within pilot projects and is already under implementation. While the ECA is represented by ACS in case of the Ethiopian pilot, the respective Sub-Regional Offices (SROs) are the face of

ECA in the implementation of the other pilot projects.

The SRO for West Africa is the first office to follow suit to the Ethiopian pilot. The details of the project have been discussed with GBoS and the University of the Gambia as the TRI during a previous mission in August 2014. The Gambia pilot has for objective to improve the data collection of the CPI and PPI. Following to the mission, a Letter of Agreement was drafted and signed. 85% of the project amount has been disbursed to GBoS upfront. A first national workshop with the main stakeholders was held in December 2014 to kick off the project which is currently in the implementation phase.

The objective of the mission to Biljo, The Gambia, was to participate in the second National Workshop of the project, to inquire about the progress of the project and to strengthen the working relation with discuss the Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS).

Envisaged results

1. Participate in the second national workshop of the Gambia pilot,
2. Learn about the project progress, the challenges and how these challenges are addressed,
3. Strengthen the working relation with GBoS.

Course of action during the mission

Participated in the first three days of the five day national workshop on the Gambia pilot project. Unfortunately, due to a flight cancellation, I missed the morning session of the first day.

Meetings between ECA/SRO-WA with GBoS as NSO, the School of ITC of the University of the Gambia (ITC-UTG) as TRI were held on the side of the workshop

Achieved results

1. Actively participated in the workshop, including an address to the audience with welcoming words putting the Gambia pilot project in context and commending the good work relation with GBoS,
2. Status of project progress was clarified through presentations by GBoS and UTG during the workshop and also in bilateral meetings,
3. The work relation with GBoS was further strengthened and areas in which GBoS would welcome further support were identified.

Main findings

The second national project workshop received high attention by the government, general public as well as international organizations in the Gambia. The second national workshop was covered by the national press, radio and television. Participants included the Minister of Information, Communication and Infrastructure, representatives of GBoS and the UTG, local councils, GSM operators, member of market boards, UNECA, UNDP, and WFP.

Mr. Ousmane, Director of Prices at GBoS, stressed that the project will increase the efficiency and quality of price data collection (CPI & PPI) in the Gambia.
The two most important advantages are:
1. Avoiding the logistics and coding/entering of paper questionnaires which is prone to loss of paper files in transport and errors.
2. Timely availability: Currently, the coding/entering of the data takes 10-12 days. The CPI

is published on the 15th of each month. Respecting this delay is a challenge for GBoS. With the use of the new technology, the CPI and PPI data will become available earlier. Since the collected price information is received almost in real time, GBoS can monitor irregularities and can task enumerators to find out about extreme changes in prices and underlying events.

Status of implementation
The project is currently in the implementation phase. The Letter of Agreement was drafted and agreed in August 2014, but only signed in November 2014 due to administrative delays on the side of ECA. Overall, the activities are on track despite the initial delay. There is great buy-in of all stakeholders, in particular GBoS and the UTG, but also from the side of the enumerators.

UTG has accelerated the implementation of the project through engaging consultants, and working overtime and weekends. A first national project workshop has been held in December in which GBoS and UTG discussed and agreed the details of implementation for this project. Following to the workshop, the project implementation phase has started.

1. Software
UTG has developed an Android application which was demonstrated during the workshop. The training of enumerators on the software will be concluded on February 16, 2015.

2. Procurement of hardware
50 android devices have been procured. The procurement process for the server upgrading is concluded. The server will be upgraded within the next two weeks. All procurements have been carried out according to the Government's procurement regulation and have been cleared by the national procurement office.

3. Time line
Most activities are on track with respect to the timeline despite the delayed project start. The server upgrading is delayed and might not be in place by the start of the field work. Instead, the data will be synced with a cloud server which is based in the UK. On February 18, the field work will commence and be concluded after 15-days. The project is expected to be completed by the end of March.

4. Challenges
    a. Connectivity : Mobile internet connectivity varies within the country and is a great challenge in some regions.
    b. Electricity : Five of the collection locations do not have electricity. In other locations, electricity connections are frequently interrupted. The charging of the android devices by grid cannot always be ensured.
    c. Ensuring a long life-time of the hardware: Protecting the android devices and server
    d. Interaction enumerator and respondents
    e. Server infrastructure not yet in place
    f. Software : The software, which was developed by UTG, is available and has been pre-tested. During the training of the enumerators some additional issues were discovered.
    g. Ensuring project sustainability beyond closing

5. Remedies
    a. Different cellular networks are used according to the region. The data is entered offline and can be synced once a connection is available.

b. Battery banks will be distributed to those who collect data in areas without electricity grid. The other interview teams will receive one power bank per team in case there are electricity problems.
   c. A contact is signed between GBoS and the enumerators documenting the reception of the devices by the enumerators and including a penalty in case of damage or theft occurs to the device.
   d. Given the young age of most of the enumerators, the way that they approach the respondents is important to receive valid responses. A special training on how to approach respondents was held during the training for the enumerators.
   e. Since the server infrastructure at GBoS has not been upgraded yet, the tablets will sync with a cloud server which is based in the UK. Once, the upgrading takes place, a cloud will continue to exist to ensure permanent connectivity. The GBoS server will sync with the cloud and allow GBoS to work with the date with a local network connection.
   f. The software developers were present during the workshop and were able to fix some of the bugs on the spot. However, there is a residual risk that more issues with the software will be discovered during the data collection phase. It would be difficult to remedy any software issues at this point.
   g. Sustainability: 50% of the enumerators who received initial training have been selected to continue collecting price information on a monthly basis using the android devices beyond the closure of the project.

6. GBoS intends to extend the use of the android-based data collection to other surveys. GBoS requests to clarify whether remaining project balances could be used to finance CSPro training for GBoS staff to create the capacity for adapting this technology also to other surveys, in particular:
   a. Core Welfare Indicator Survey,
   b. Integrated Household Survey / expenditure survey (IHS),
   c. Education Survey,
   d. MICS, DHS.

Identification of further areas of support / cooperation:
During a side meeting with GBoS, three areas in which the GBoS needs support were identified and GBoS requested SRO-WA to explore whether ECA can provide assistance in any of these areas. The areas include:
1. Data dissemination platforms,
2. National Strategy for Development of Statistics,
3. Capacity building (Human Resources and also software infrastructure).

Next actions to be taken

1) Continue to monitor and follow the project progress,
2) SRO-WA to explore whether ECA can provide assistance to GBoS in indicated areas.

Conclusion

The project implementation is on track and now enters the crucial phase of data collection. The project is scheduled to be completed in March 2015.

Annex:
1. Newspaper article on the workshop,
2. Pictures of the workshop.