

**UNDER-DISSEMINATION OF OFFICIAL
STATISTICAL INFORMATION IN CAMEROON:
EXPLANATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES ON THE
GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY PAPER
(GESP 2010-2020)**



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ABSTRACT

Despite an unprecedented increase in official statistics operations conducted in Cameroon, the dissemination of the end-results has not increased to the same degree, thereby creating a situation of 'under-dissemination' and 'scarce statistics'. The objective of this study was to identify and explain the reasons for this state of affair and its consequences on the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP). The methodological triangulation and descriptive statistics techniques were used for the collection and analysis of relevant data. Major findings show that administrative practices of information retention; issues related to data quality; and weak statistics capacity were the main reasons for under-dissemination of official statistical information in Cameroon. Though a plurality of mediums was used, they were unequally treated and the traditional paper medium remains the most important. Also, the Internet was perceived as a useful tool, but unfortunately was not sufficiently exploited, creating a somewhat paradigmatic paralysis. This study reveals that under dissemination of official statistical information has far reaching consequences on the institutional implementation framework, monitoring and evaluation and the participative monitoring mechanisms of the GESP. On the bases of these findings a set of recommendations were formulated as contributions of this study to the amelioration of the present situation.

Keywords : Official statistics; Information dissemination; Internet; Paradigmatic paralysis; Growth and employment strategy paper; Cameroon.

RÉSUMÉ

Malgré une augmentation sans précédent des opérations statistiques officielles menées au Cameroun, la diffusion des résultats finaux n'a pas augmenté au même degré, créant ainsi une situation de «sous-diffusion» et de «statistiques rares». L'objectif de cette étude était d'examiner et d'expliquer les raisons de cette situation et ses conséquences sur le Document de Stratégie pour la Croissance et l'Emploi (DSCE). Les techniques de triangulation méthodologique et statistiques descriptives ont été utilisées pour la collecte et l'analyse des données pertinentes. Les principaux résultats montrent que la pratique administrative de la rétention de l'information; les problèmes liés à la mauvaise qualité des données; et les faibles capacités statistiques ont été les principales explications. Bien qu'une pluralité des medias ait été utilisée, ils n'ont pas été traités de la même manière et le traditionnel support papier reste le plus important. En outre, l'Internet était perçu comme un outil important, malheureusement il n'a pas été suffisamment exploité, créant ainsi une sorte de paralysie paradigmatique. Cette étude révèle que la sous-diffusion de l'information statistique officielle a des conséquences importantes sur le cadre de mise en œuvre institutionnelle, le suivi et l'évaluation et les mécanismes de suivi participatif de la DSCE. Sur la base de ces résultats, un ensemble de recommandations a été formulé comme contribution de cette étude à l'amélioration de la situation actuelle.

Mots-clés : Statistiques officielles; Diffusion de l'information; Internet; Paralysie paradigmatique; Document de Stratégie pour la Croissance et de l'Emploi; Cameroun.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the diversity of discourse on development issues in Africa, the fact that the continent still remains underdeveloped is undisputable (Lwazi, 2009:1). Therefore, at the dawn of the third millennium; Africa's leaders committed themselves to the management of development results¹. The "results agenda" involves the production of official statistics² of reliable quantity and quality, required for a clear and systematic measurement of the achievements and the impact of development programmes: New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union (AU) 2063 development agenda, etc.

In alignment with the results agenda, the Cameroonian government designed the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP 2010-2020) in 2009. In response to the statistics need of the GESP, an unprecedented effort has been made of recent by Official Statistics Producers (OSPs) to conduct statistics operations and to provide data and information resources needed for a systematic monitoring, evaluation and reporting on progress made, outcomes, and impact of this development strategy. The end-result of these operations constitute the cornerstone of an integrated system of innovative, socio-demographic and economic information and represent a unique legacy on the evolution of the population and state of socioeconomic development of the country. It is in this context that, the principle n^o.1 of the United Nations Fundamental Principles of official statistics³ holds that:

Official statistics provide an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, serving government, the economy, the demographic, social and environmental situation. To this end, official statistics that meet the test of practical utility are to be compiled and made available on an impartial basis by official statistical agencies to honour citizens' entitlement to public information.

In line with the above principle and other internationally accepted agreements, République du Cameroun – Conseil National de la Statistique (2009:1) stated that "*all the actions of the Cameroonian National Statistics System must be supported by a major principle: the production of official statistics for public service. This explains the engagement of the State to include statistical information in its regalia mission, just like security, education or health issues*".

Equally, République du Cameroun – Secretariat du Conseil National de la Statistique (n.d.: 2) holds that: *the effectiveness of a statistical information system can be examined at three levels: the organisational framework, production aspects and problems related to publication and dissemination of information produced.*

Despite the above, assessments made by République du Cameroun – Institut National de la Statistique (2014: 2), République du Cameroun - Conseil National de la Statistique (2009:14 & 2015:16), are unanimous that, though significant efforts has been made in the production of official statistical information resources, the dissemination of the end-results to the user-public has so far not increased to the same degree. Equally, official statistical information resources produced are still disseminated esoterically and essentially on paper medium, only accessible on the spot and with a very high risk of destruction, deterioration and disappearance, due to poor preservation. Consequently, a situation of ‘under-dissemination’ and ‘scarce statistics’ has been observed.

Indeed, the velocity in the production of official statistical information resources requires mechanisms for the dissemination of the end-results with lower latency times than the one experienced in the use of the paper medium. It is on these bases that, various international declarations, recommendations and agreements to which Cameroon is a signatory call for the adoption of ICTs, alongside other ‘traditional’ channels for the dissemination of official statistical information resources. In order to meet-up with the above, article 4 (c) of the Presidential decree n° 2001/100 of 20th April 2001, bearing the creation, organisation and functioning of the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), disposes among others that: *public access to statistical information is to be facilitated through the use of information and communication technologies.* This therefore involves the use of the Internet and the implementation of internationally accepted standards and methodologies to facilitate the dissemination of available resources. Thus to change from the dissemination of ‘stocks’ of materials on the paper medium to the dissemination of ‘digital flows’ and, a shift of focus from “government’ to ‘society’. Therefore, taken that the function and target of a discipline identifies its paradigmatic stance, these changes are relevant enough to demonstrate a ‘paradigm shift’ in the dissemination of official statistical information.

Based on an inter-disciplinary and descriptive approach, the objective of this study was to assess and explain the reasons for the

under-dissemination of official statistical information in Cameroon and the consequences on the GESP. In order to provide direction to this study, the principal research question posed was: Why is official statistical information under-disseminated in Cameroon and with what consequences on the GESP? Meanwhile, the major hypothesis was that: Official statistical information is under-disseminated in Cameroon because of information retention practices and with consequences of far reaching magnitude on the implementation of the GESP.

I. Overview of the Growth and employment strategy papers (GESP)

I.1 Context

Due to increasing unemployment and the rising cost of living at the national level, as well as the financial, migratory, food, energy, and security crisis at the international level, the Cameroonian government decided to design the GESP in 2009. This document constitutes a reference framework for government action in the creation of growth and employment opportunities over the period 2010-2020. It is a national strategic guideline that covers the first ten years of a long-term development vision. It intends to make Cameroon an emerging country by 2035, and in line with the African union's (AU) 2063 development agenda. This statistics driven development programme is intended to among other things; accelerate growth, create formal employment and reduce poverty. Its overall objective is not only to address development challenges but to equally place Cameroon on a path of sustainable growth and emergence as well as extricate the country from the malaise of under-development and exclusion in the globalising world. In accordance with the Paris Declaration on Aids Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action⁴, to which Cameroon adheres, this framework is the point of convergence for cooperation with development partners and a springboard for all development actions.

I.2 Statistical Information needs of the GESP

The monitoring, evaluation and reporting on GESP is drawn from lessons learned and based on the principles of results-driven management. This includes the production of reliable statistical information for evidence-based policy formulation, implementation and rational use of public resources. This implies that the monitoring system of the GESP is supposed to be carried out in a dual approach: monitoring of implementation and results. This includes among other things: the reporting on output, strengthening the national statistical

information system, definition of specific performance indicators, production of quality data (reliable, updated, useful), use of statistics information for decision making and partnership in the design and management of the system. This explains why, in order to conveniently respond to the statistics needs of the GESP, a second National Strategy for Statistics Development (2015-2020)⁵ was drafted and aligned to suit the reference period of the strategy and its orientations.

1.3 The role of official statistical information in the attainment of the GESP

The production and dissemination of statistical information of reliable quantity and quality is expected to significantly improve knowledge on poverty related issues, thereby ensuring the harmonisation, coherence and coordination of the system of data collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of end-results; identify a set of relevant indicators to objectively measure the progress achieved in poverty reduction and human development; periodic measurement of outputs, outcomes and the impact of development programmes and policies; ensure accessibility to reliable information to all stakeholders; and building the capacity of national structures in monitoring and evaluation. In this light, official statistical information becomes a support tool for evidence-based policy formulation, decision making, socio-economic development planning, and the assessment of progress made towards attaining the GESP.

II. Literature review

Generally speaking, the production of official statistical data and information resources is an old phenomenon in human society. Introduced by the colonial masters as a tryer balloon in the 19th century, initially through census and civil registration operations, this exercise has become an established workflow in Cameroon today.

II.1 Evolution in official statistics production in Cameroon

According to Gubry (1984), Fotso (1984) Gubry & Lemdja (1985), the production of official statistics in Cameroon dates back to the implantation of the Germans in Cameroon in 1884. Unfortunately, their findings reveal that it is difficult to make an inventory of statistics operations conducted and resources generated in Cameroon, because of problems related to dissemination and preservation. On this, Ngwe (2007) explained that, Cameroon is one of the countries in Africa where significant progress has been made in official statistics production, but

taking into consideration the human, technical and financial potential of the country, these efforts are still limited. However, in an attempt to assess the evolution of official statistical information production in Cameroon, Awung (2010) found that, between the years 2000 to 2009 thirty-seven (37) official statistics operations were conducted, making close to 50% of total national cumulative production.

II.2 Dissemination of official statistical information resources

Amidst increasing effort in the conduct of official statistics operations in the 1980s, République du Cameroun – Secrétariat du Conseil National de la Statistique (s.d.) signalled a low-level of dissemination of statistical data in Cameroon and recommended the search for new channels and means to increase dissemination and preservation of research results. On an assessment of statistical systems in Africa, PARIS21 and Statistics Norway (2009) reported that, generally, the dissemination of statistics from numerous surveys has so far not increased to the same degree and that there is a long tradition for a more limited dissemination, mostly to government organisations and often not very user-friendly.

Oyekanmi (1999) argued that, the gathering of population data is not merely for esoterically purposes and research activity is not complete if its findings cannot be published and disseminated. This author holds that, the lack of accurate, reliable and up-to-data is a problem for development planners in many African countries. In this light, République du Cameroun – Secrétariat du Conseil National de la Statistique (idem) and Awung (idem) pointed that the difficulties involved in the publication and dissemination of statistical information in Cameroon are related to: the quality of available information, information deficit, absence of common norms, out datedness of the dissemination medium used, and practice of information retention.

II.3 Internet dissemination of statistical information

UNECE (2009) asserts that most statistics agencies rely mainly on two means of communicating information on the economic and social conditions of a country and its citizens: the Internet and the media. According to Smerekar (2009), the Internet has introduced a revolution in the dissemination, communication and accessibility to official statistical information in the second half of the 1990s. Howley (2008) added that, the Internet is becoming the preferred channel for dissemination of statistics. According to this author, the Internet has

a number of advantages in terms of interactivity, versatility, speed and cost efficiencies. On this, Dosso (2005), Seid (2009) & National Institute of Statistics - Cameroon (2010), are unanimous that, the ongoing changes in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has provided National Statistics Offices (NSOs) with new opportunities in providing statistical data and information to users; and has opened a window on the world that could alleviate information scarcity widely experienced by African countries.

The above literature review paints a picture of the state of the arts regarding the research phenomenon. It indicates that while some previous researchers have attempted to assess the evolution in the conduct of official statistics operations in Cameroon, others have limited their findings on the difficulties related to the dissemination of the end result. Based on their findings, the present research intended to open new research frontiers by assessing the reasons for the under-dissemination of official statistical information and its consequences on the Growth and Employment Strategy Papers in Cameroon. This type of study which remains very thorny is necessary to provide understanding on the reasons while official statistical information is under-disseminated in Cameroon, as well as the consequences of this state of affair on a long-term national development programme.

III. Theoretical framework

Two popular communication theories were found suitable to provide direction to this research: **Diffusion of innovations theory** and the **System theory of communication process**.

III.1 Diffusion of innovations theory

Popularised by Everett Rogers in his work titled *Diffusion of Innovations* (1962). This theory explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through cultures. It defines diffusion as 'the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system'. The diffusion of innovation paradigm includes four main elements, which were also identified in the present study. These elements are:

- i. An innovation (*statistical information*);
- ii. Communicated through certain channels (*mass media channels*);
- iii. Over time (*release and dissemination lapses*); and
- iv. Among members of a social system (*Official statistics users*).

This theory was found suitable to explain the adoption of specific communication channels to disseminate official statistical information resources (innovations), over time, to end-users.

III.2 System theory of communication process

This study considered official statistics production activities as a goal-directed system, with a set of parts (operations) interlinked together, beginning from: statistics operation design, data collection, analysis, dissemination and use for various purposes, with feedback from the users to influence the overall operation. These operations are interlinked and interdependent so much so that, a deficiency in one part (dissemination) induces changes in other parts and in the overall system. It is in this light that, this research work made use of the system theory of communication process to explain and provide understanding on how a situation of under-dissemination of official statistical information affects the entire system and purpose of official statistical information delivery and use in Cameroon. This theory looks at communication process as a means to an end. If dissemination channels do not work properly, then the solution was obvious: communication technologies have to be adopted and dissemination channels have to be improved so that desired levels of effectiveness and accuracy are achieved.

IV. Methodology

IV.1 Study population

The study population was constituted of thirty-seven (37) official statistics producers in Cameroon. The Cameroon National Statistics Council classified these institutions into four (04) groups depending on the level of development of their Statistical Information infrastructure:

- **Group 0:** 02 main OSPs.
- **Group 1:** 07 OSPs with statistics units sufficiently developed and with a functional information system.
- **Group 2:** 12 institutions with an estimated average level of production and functioning of the statistical information system.
- **Group 3:** 16 institutions with a deplorable absence of an institutional framework, thus a statistical information system and the non-existence of resources, resulting to unavailability of statistical data.

IV.2 Data collection

The methodological triangulation technique was used for the collection of relevant data for this study. Through this technique, quantitative data was collected with the use of a thematic questionnaire, consisted of closed and open-ended questions. Interaction with respondents (main statistician or other resource persons in OSP institutions) was in the form of face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire retrieval rate stood at (91.89%). This technique was complimented by a qualitative data collection method, which permitted the use of three (03) instruments: Official Statistics Producers website checklist, field observation, documents search and analysis.

IV.3 Data analysis

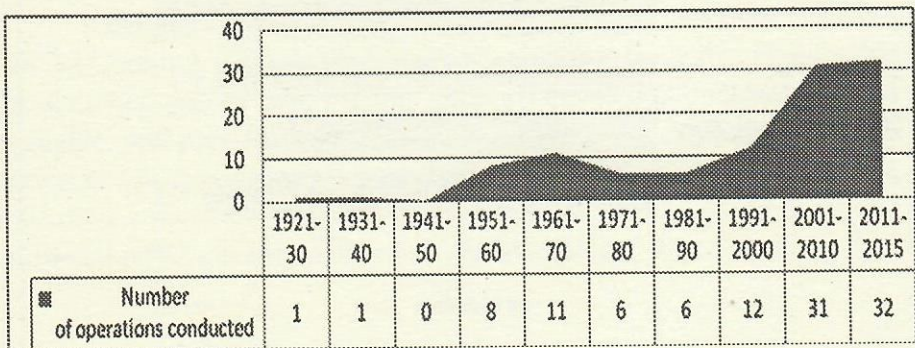
Data collected for this study was analysed using the descriptive statistics technique. This intended to reduce data set, allow easier interpretation and reporting of results. It equally permitted the use of frequency distribution tables, percentages, rank averages and mean scores for data distribution.

V. Under-Dissemination of Official Statistical Information In Cameroon: Emperical Evidence and Explanations

V.1 Rapid and appreciable increase in official statistics production

Documented sources (monographs, scientific articles, archival materials, websites, etc.) permitted the construction of an inventory table, constituted of one-hundred and eight (108) official statistics operations conducted in Cameroon from 1921 (when the first operation was conducted) to 2015 (reference year for this study). This provided evidence on operations conducted and information resources generated.

Fig. 1: Evolution and types of official statistics operations conducted from 1921 to 2015



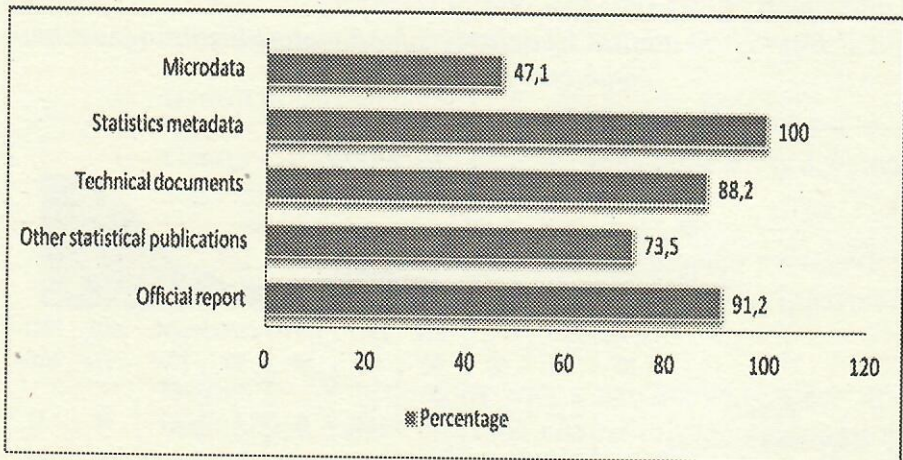
Source: Researcher's field work

Fig. 1 above indicates that official statistics production started in Cameroon during the colonial period (1921) and has slowly evolved overtime into an established workflow today. The decennial years 1921-30 and 1931-40 respectively recorded just a single operation (0.9%), while the decennial year 1941-50 did not record a single operation. However, just before and after independence, official statistics production got a new impetus, this explains why the 1951- 60 and the 1961-70 decennials recorded and increase to 08 (7.4%) and 11 (10.2%) operations respectively. The 1971-80 and 1981-90 decennial recorded a sharp drop to 6 (5.6%) operations respectively. However, this record was doubled in the 1991-2000 decennial with 12 (11.1%) operation conducted. This result almost tripled in the 2001-2010 decennial and the 2010-2015 half decennial, that recorded 31 (28.7%) and 32 (29.6%) respectively. The above result reveals that a rapid and appreciable effort has been made, especially in the last fifteen years (2001 to 2015), to conduct official statistics operations, recording 58.3% of total national production.

V.2 Types of operations conducted and information resources produced

This study found that two main types of official statistics operations were conducted in Cameroon from 1921 to 2015: statistics survey (80%) and census (20%). This generated various types of statistical information resources.

Fig. 2: Types of official statistical information resources produced in Cameroon



Source: Researcher's field work

Fig. 3 above indicates that, all the 34 official statistics producers investigated declared that they produced statistics metadata (100%), while 91.2% produced official statistics reports. Meanwhile 88% declared that they produced technical statistics documents (questionnaires, manuals, guides, cartographic materials, etc.). In this same line, 73.5% produced other statistics publications including: monographs, periodicals, brochures, flyers, etc. However, just 47.1% declared that they produced micro data, which are found to be resources normally demanding greater statistics expertise.

V.3 Evidence of under-dissemination of official statistical information in Cameroon

Official statistics dissemination permits the end-results of conducted operations to become known, visible, used and appreciated by the user-public, thereby creating a certain reputation to the producer. However, data collected on the level of dissemination of available official statistical information resources points to a situation of under-dissemination.

Table 1: Percentage distribution on the level of dissemination of official statistical information

Dissemination of available resources	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, all	16	48.5
Yes, most	11	33.3
Yes, some few	5	15.2
No, not at all	1	3
Total	33	100

Source: Researcher's field work

Indeed, of the 34 OSPs surveyed, table 1 above indicates that 33, making 97% declared having a unit specifically responsible for statistics production. Of this proportion, 48.5% declared that all available statistical information resource were disseminated, 33.3% disseminated most of what was available, 15.2% disseminated some, while 3% completely did not. This implies that put together, 51.5% of OSPs did not disseminate all what was available.

V.4 Reasons for under - dissemination of statistical information resources

On the above results, this study sought to examine the reasons why more than half (51.5%) of OSPs did not disseminate all official statistical information resources available.

Table 2: Principal reasons for the non-dissemination of available statistical information resources

Principal reason	Frequency	Percentage
Poor quality	2	11.8
Administrative instruction / information retention	7	41.8
Protection of the confidentiality	2	11.8
Insufficient human, material, financial and technical resources	1	5.9
Resources reserved for internal use only	1	5.9
Invalidity of data on school attendance ages	1	5.9
Resources were not for dissemination	2	11.8
Absent of a dissemination guide	1	5.9

Source: Researcher's field work

Of the 51.5% of OSPs who did not disseminate all available statistical information resources available, data collected and presented on table 2 above shows that disguised and undisguised administrative instruction and/or information retention was the principal reason (41.76%). Other important reasons declared by 11.8% of OSPs respectively include: poor quality, protection of confidentiality and the fact that data produced were exempt from dissemination. Equally, insufficient human, financial and technical resources, the fact that available resources were exclusively for internal use, data invalidity (for example data on school attendance ages), and the absent of a permanent dissemination guide were also given respectively by 5.9% of OSPs. The above result indicates that three principal reasons explain why official statistical information is under-disseminated in Cameroon:

i. Disguised and undisguised administrative practices: Administrative instructions, including deliberate refusal to grant authorisation, information retention, statistics data censorship and absent of finding aids;

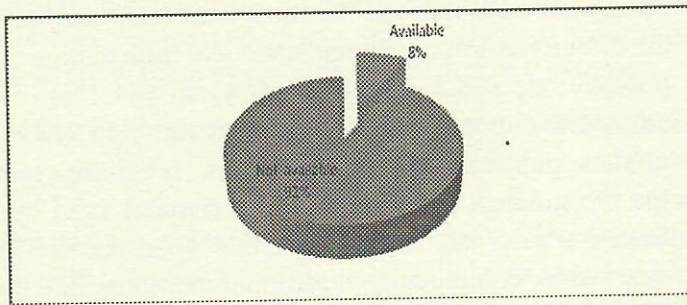
ii. Issues related to data quality: Poor quality, data invalidity, protection of respondents' confidentiality and "statistics secret";

iii. Insufficient statistics capacity: Insufficient human, material, financial and technical resources.

V.5 Unavailability of finding aid to official statistics operations and related resources

A statistical information finding aid is a dissemination and access tool, providing information on statistics operations conducted, and may include reference information on related resources generated. This type of guide is important to inform the public on what has been produced, what is available, where, how and who can access them. Looking at the importance of such a tool in providing both traditional and remote access to statistical information resources, this research sought to collect data on its availability.

Fig 3: Availability of finding aid to official statistical information resources



Source: Researcher’s field work

Data collected and presented on fig. 3 above shows that, of the 34 institutions surveyed, 8% declared that they possessed an incomplete and haphazard inventories or finding aid to only official statistics operations and related resources which they themselves produced over time, while 92% declared not to have such a tool. This result therefore indicates that, there is a crucial absent of an information guide or finding aid to official statistical information in Cameroon. Alone, this finding clearly demonstrates the difficulties involve in finding statistical information resources in Cameroon.

V.6 Media pluralism but unequally treatment in the dissemination of official statistical information

The media plays a crucial role in the dissemination of statistical information – not only to the general public, but to specific user groups as well. Findings on the type of channels used by OSPs in Cameroon

for the dissemination of official statistics information indicated that a plurality of mediums was employed.

Table 3: Medium used by OSPs for the dissemination of official statistical information

Medium	Frequency	Percentage
Printed statistic publications	30	88.2
Internet	15	44.1
Radio	10	29.4
Written press	9	26.5
Television	9	26.5
CD ROM	7	20.6
Brochure, leaflet , flyers	3	8.8
USB drive	1	2.9
Exposition	1	2.9

Source: Researcher's field work

Table 3 above shows that, the most important medium used by OSPs for the dissemination of official statistical information is the print statistics publications (88.2%) and the Internet (44.1%). The above findings indicate that put together, the paper medium constituted of: printed statistics publications, written press, brochure, leaflets and flyers, forms the greatest proportion of the channel used by OSPs to disseminate end-results of official statistics operations. Meanwhile, on one-to-one bases, compared to traditional mediums like the written press, radio and television, the use of the Internet medium is on an increase.

However, though the above findings may paint a more or less blossom picture, direct observation points to a situation of unequal treatment. Indeed, though the media is often invited for the release of the results of official statistics operations conducted mainly by OSPs in group 0, media organs were not equally treated. Indeed, there is a general tendency for OSPs in Cameroon to release official statistical information most often to the public media or to give them more impetus in the handling of statistical information, creating a situation of lack of confidence and trust between them and the private media. Moreover, the media is not effectively given its place as an important dissemination agent of official statistical information but considered more as a user. This explain to an extend why talking to the media, training them on statistical information exploitation and reporting, and informing them in advance on official statistics release calendar is hard to come by.

V.7 Paradigmatic paralysis in Internet dissemination of official statistical information

From the dissemination of statistical information resources essentially on the paper medium 'stocks' to the dissemination of 'digital flows' on the Internet, a new shift in paradigm has occurred. However, findings in this study indicate a somewhat paradigmatic paralysis in Cameroon.

V.7.1 High Internet penetration but little use for dissemination of official statistical information

Findings in this study indicate a high Internet penetration rate within OSPs. Indeed, 57.6% had permanent Internet connection, 39.4% had a non-permanent Internet connection, while 03% did not have at all. This indicates that a greater proportion (97%) at least had Internet connection. Equally, about 9 out of every 10 OSPs in Cameroon possessed an institutional website. With regards to the proportion who declared that they possessed an institutional website, 59% declared that they used this medium to disseminate statistical information tapped from official statistical operations conducted in Cameroon.

V.7.2 Principal reasons for internet dissemination of official statistical information

In order to provide a clearer understanding of the above result, this study further sought to find out and to establish the reasons why 17 OSPs used their websites to disseminate the end-results of statistics operations.

Table 4: Principal reason for the use of websites for the dissemination of official statistical information

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Better visibility/ acceptance/ reputation/ reinforcement of confidence	14	82.4
Facilitate access / use of statistical information resources	13	76.5
Political/ strategic reasons	7	41.2
Governance / Transparency / democracy	3	17.7
Recommendation from partners	2	11.8
Facilitate storage and preservation	2	11.8
Valid report statistics report	1	5.9
Adaptation to modernity	1	5.9
Profitability	0	0.0

Source: Researcher's field work

Table 4 indicates that, many reasons explain why OSPs in Cameroon used their websites for the dissemination of statistical information resources produced. However, two important reasons were distinguished. Improve visibility, acceptance, reputation and reinforcement of confidence (82.4%) was the first and most important reason. This was closely followed by the need to facilitate access and use of statistical information (76.5%). Other important reasons mentioned include: Political and strategic reasons (41.2%); good governance, transparency and democracy (17.7%); the respect for recommendations formulated by statistics partners and to facilitate storage and preservation respectively scored 11.8%, while the fact that the final report of the statistics operations was not valid and also to adapt to modernity was mentioned by 5.9% of OSPs.

However, profitability conspicuously was not mentioned by OSPs as one of the reason for the use of their website for the dissemination of the end-results of statistical operations conducted. This confirmed direct observations made by the researcher, which indicates that a thorough cost-benefit study has not yet been carried out to compare the cost of the tradition methods of dissemination, which was predominantly on the print medium (hard copies) and involving heavy mobilisation of funds for editing, printing and distribution on one hand, and the dissemination of soft copies of these resources via websites.

Equally, it should be noted that this result was based on data gathered on declarations made by OSPs, which sharply differs with the results obtained from direct assessment of their websites. This instead gave a far lesser percentage (15%) of OSPs, whom this study considered as confirmed adopters of the Internet medium in the dissemination of official statistical information.

V.7.3 Training and respect of Internet dissemination standards

Though the Internet has been recognised as a cost-effective and popular medium for the dissemination of statistical information resources by statistics stakeholders, its effective use requires the acquisition of specific skills and the respect of internationally accepted standards. The acquisition of these skills and the application of standards ensure uniformity, comparability and interoperability. However, this study found that, only some few workers of the two OSPs in group 0 (INS & BUCREP) have acquired basic training and somehow observed basic standards in Internet dissemination of official statistical information (5.9%). In the few cases identified, the prevailing

practice was essentially through 'learning-by-doing' and with a lot of approximation. This suggests that, adequate training is needed in this area for the National Statistical Information System to speak in one voice and act in a uniform manner.

V.8 Perceived usefulness of the Internet for the dissemination of official statistical information by OSPs

The perceived usefulness of the Internet in the dissemination of official statistical information resources is a major determinant for its adoption and use by OSPs.

Table 5: Distribution of OSPs according to perceived usefulness of the Internet for the dissemination of official statistical information

Perceived Internet usefulness	Frequency	Percentage
Very useful	12	85.7
Useful	2	14.3
Not useful	0	0
Not useful at all	0	0
Total	14	100

Source : Reseacher 's field work

VI.2 Under-dissemination of official statistical information and consequences on the GESp

The GESp is statistics intensive and predicted on the notion that there is both the capacity to produce and effectively disseminate statistical information to support the institutional framework for its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. However, despite an increase in the production of the highly needed official statistical information, findings in this study show that these efforts are unfortunately watered-down as these resources remain under-disseminated to the end-users. Further analysis and interpretation of the findings show that the prevailing situation has consequences of far reaching magnitude on the GESp. These consequences are essentially of three-dimensions and namely on the Institutional implementation framework, monitoring and evaluation, and participatory monitoring mechanisms.

VI.2.1 Consequences on the institutional implementation framework of the GESp

The institutional implementation framework of the GESp is constituted at the central level, of the state (ministerial departments,

inter-ministerial and technical committees), with support from the private sector, civil society and financial and technical development partners. Meanwhile, at the local level, regional committees ensure evidence-based design, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation and of programmes and projects defined in the strategy. The priority actions of the above framework include: public policies review, public expenditure programming, resource mobilisation, assessment of growth and employment related issues, result-based management and reporting on outcomes. The availability of reliable and timely statistical information, openly disseminated using user-friendly channels, freely and easily accessible by various stakeholders is crucial for the effective functioning of the above framework. Under-dissemination of these resources as observed in this study, do not only create a situation of scarce statistics, but implies a building ground for alternatives to evidence-based policy formulation and decision making, which include:

i. Power and influence of sectional interests: Public policy decisions are reached according to due legal and administrative processes, but are made to satisfy particular lobbies, interest groups or elites.

ii. Corruption: Policy-makers make decisions which favour particular individuals or groups in order to maximise their private gain. The policy-maker violates constitutional norms and receives illegal payments in cash or kind.

iii. Political ideology: Policy-makers are guided in their decisions by adherence to particular political beliefs or ideologies which are relatively impervious to empirical evidence.

iv. Arbitrariness: In the absence of clear criteria or evidence by which to take decisions, or of any process of accountability, policy-making becomes an arbitrary exercise.

v. Anecdote: On occasions, decision makers and legislators use anecdotes recounted by colleagues, family members, friends or constituents as a basis for making policy.

VI.2.2 Consequences on the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanism

The M&E system of the GESP is supposed to be carried out in a dual approach: monitoring of implementation and results. In order to be efficient and exhaustive, M&E of GESP implementation requires full participation by informed stakeholders. However, the

results of this study indicates that, though a significant effort has been made in the production of various types of official statistics resources (metadata, micro data, technical documents, statistics publication, etc) needed to produce quantitative and qualitative indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of poverty levels and household living conditions, these resources are under-disseminated and therefore, not sufficiently accessible and used by stakeholders who need to use them for monitoring, evaluation and reporting on progress made in this development programme.

It should be noted that, an M&E system is only as good as the statistics which feeds it. As Edmunds and Marchant (2008:9) denotes, such a system is much more than a means of tracking and measuring performance and outcomes. It is a central component of the process of management for results for a strategy such as GESP, in which data collection and processing becomes integrated into every phase of the strategy. This therefore requires that the GESP M&E system should fully integrate official statistics dissemination, access and use dimensions. This involves the timely definition of a common platform for statistical information dissemination to stakeholders in order to enable the smooth steering of poverty reduction activities, and obtain reliable information on the consent and aspirations of target groups and beneficiaries.

This implies therefore that, for official statistics to effectively play its role as a support tool for M&E of the GESP, OSPs need to continually seek to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Internet alongside other channels, to improve dissemination and open access to available statistical information. In addition, obstacles such as disguised and undisguised administrative practices of information retention, problems related to data quality and statistics capacity building, availability of funding aid to official statistics operations and related resources, Internet dissemination, etc. should be enhanced.

VI.2.3 Consequences on the participatory monitoring mechanism

The overall purpose for participatory monitoring is to institute constructive and durable dialogue between the various stakeholders of the GESP. It is on these bases that, the institutional mechanism for participatory dialogue for the implementation of the GESP is composed of four levels: national, regional, division and council. The mechanism was conceived to permit stakeholders to receive updated information on: inputs, outcomes, outputs, results and level of execution of programmes and projects, and equally, to ensure ownership, transparency and accountability of the different stakeholders.

However, most of the GESP stakeholders are a distance away from OSPs and also scattered over the national territory and even beyond, making the media a useful channel in the dissemination and access provision to available official statistical information resources. Unfortunately, as revealed by this study, though a plurality of mediums was used, a situation of unequal treatment was observed, with a general tendency to give priority to public media organs in the release of statistical information to the public. In this respect, Internet dissemination seems to be an important alternative. However, this can only make sense, if the statistics culture and ICT infrastructure, especially Internet connectivity is improved.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this study was to make a double edge assessment of the phenomenon of under-dissemination of official statistical information in Cameroon and the consequences on the GESP. Background knowledge on the GESP, official statistics production and dissemination in Cameroon, permitted the construction of a theoretical model and a methodology to provide direction to this research. The major findings validate to a greater extent, the main research hypothesis which states that, official statistical information is under-disseminated because of information retention practices and with consequences of far reaching magnitude on the implementation GESP. Indeed, this study found that though an appreciable effort was invested in official statistics production, this was partially watered-down, as information resources generated were under-disseminated because of administrative practices of information retention, but also as a result of issues related to data quality and insufficient statistics capacity. Equally, despite an observed paradigm shift in official statistics dissemination around the world, instead a somewhat paradigmatic paralysis was observed in Cameroon.

Further analysis of the findings of this study indicated far reaching consequences on the institutional implementation framework, monitoring and evaluation mechanism and the participatory monitoring mechanism of the GESP. It is on these bases that, a set of recommendations were formulated to stakeholders of the National Statistics System and to the Cameroonian government:

Recommendations to stakeholders of the National Statistics System:

- i.) To ameliorate the quality of official statistical data and the implementation of a more flexible and comprehensive data certification and visa mechanism;
- ii.) To develop an official statistics dissemination policy and strategy, effectively implemented and respected by all Official Statistics Producers without exception;
- iii.) To more effectively use the media as a dissemination agents, providing them equal treatment and training in the use of statistical information;
- iv.) To develop ICT capacities, including human resources capacity in Internet dissemination of statistical information;
- v.) To develop statistics literacy programmes, ameliorate website contents quality and the construction of a central statistics online portal for Cameroon.

Recommendation to the Cameroonian government:

- vi.) To reinforce national statistics culture through a nation-wide and institutionally-driven framework of communication for behavioral change campaign;
- vii.) To improve ICT infrastructure in terms of quality, coverage and usage;
- viii.) To reinforce the operational capacity of the National Statistical Information System;
- ix.) To include official statistics amongst public goods and to enactment an open access law to official statistical information resources.

Though this source-based research may be limited in scope and methodological design, it however provides useful knowledge on the phenomenon of under-dissemination of official statistical information and the consequences of this state of affair on a national development strategy (GESP) and the overall 2035 national development version for Cameroon. This contribution may be useful to inform rational decision making and to open new research frontier necessary to provide reflections and response to emerging development challenges.

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NOTES

The concept of management for development result (mfdr) www.mfdr.org, draws on the theories of development change and change management and includes development programme such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), and other national and sectoral development plans.

2 Statistics are broadly categorised into official and unofficial statistics. Official statistics are a specific subset of statistics, broadly defined as the national statistics that are produced and/or published by government agencies, public bodies or international organisations. They conventionally include economic statistics (national accounts, balance of payments, government financials) and socio-demographic statistics (population, health, education and labour market figures), and are produced for a number of purposes. While no internationally accepted definition of official statistics exists, efforts have been made to developed common standards of characteristics of official statistics (such as the UN Economic and Social Council's adopted Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics). Aside from these, a large number of other statistics (unofficial) are produced by actors such as private sector.

3 UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (<http://www.unstat.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/fundprinciples.aspx>),

adopted by the General Assembly on 29 January 2014.

4 Paris Declaration on Aids Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action (<https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm>), At the Second High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (2005) it was recognised that aid could - and should - be producing better impacts. The Paris Declaration was endorsed in order to base development efforts on first-hand experience of what works and does not work with aid. It is formulated around five central pillars: Ownership, Alignment, Harmonisation, Managing for Results and Mutual Accountability. In 2008 at the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness an even greater number and wider diversity of stakeholders endorsed the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA). The AAA both reaffirms commitment to the Paris Declaration and calls for greater partnership between different parties working on aid and development.

5 The National Strategy for Statistics Development (NSSD 2015-2020) is a reference framework for government actions in the production and promotion of statistics, and its effective use for evidence-based policy formulation, decision making and development planning at different levels.