

The Regional Statistical Information System at the Service of Local Development: Status and Prospects. The Case of the Regional Department of the High Commission for Planning, Souss Massa Region, Morocco

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Abstract:— *The role of the regional statistical information system (RSIS) remains little approached. Yet this system enables public and private institutions to base their policies and action programs on knowledge and analysis of the situation at the regional level. They need to have regular access to a series of indicators capable of informing them about the realities they manage and providing them with the information they need to make decisions or take action. Producing meaningful statistical data for the provinces and prefectures of the Souss Massa region requires sample sizes that are out of all proportion to the human and budgetary resources available to the regional Department of the High Commission for Planning (HCP). It also implies remedying the slow pace of production of economic statistics and data (Agadir communal inventory survey, production structure survey, etc.). As part of this proposal, we will study the statistical information system specific to the Regional Department of the HCP (RDHCP), focusing our analysis on the human and logistical resources available to the RDHCP, the shortcomings of the information collection system, and the prospects for partnership with decentralized administrations with a view to improving the regional statistical system.*

Keywords: — *Statistical information system, decentralized administrations, local level, regionalization, development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Increasingly regarded as a public good, statistical information today plays a fundamental role in the process of economic growth and is a guarantee of transparency and accountability. It's true that statistical information is an essential tool in the design and evaluation of public policies and socio-economic programs. But it also plays a key role for companies as a decision-making tool. The quest for statistical information by the various players involved in economic policy operators and the general public is booming to such an extent that it must be permanently credible, exhaustive, reliable, and available on time.

The importance of information for all management and steering activities is well established. Indeed, the information element is becoming essential, whether for the judicious setting of priorities and needs in terms of economic and social development or the establishment of general and sectoral policies. Information is an indispensable support for decision-making in that it provides the information needed to undertake actions for change.

The growing development of information systems is a response to the widespread demand for regular, reliable, and organized information. These systems must enable us to grasp reality in all its complexity.

Does the RSIS meet the requirements and expectations of socio-economic development in the Souss Massa region? In an attempt to answer this question, the first part of this study presents a historic overview of the development of statistics in Morocco. The second, third, and fourth parts highlight the Moroccan Statistical Information System and its various regional variations. The fifth part focuses on the study of statistical information in the Souss Massa region, using the case of the RDHCP.

II. DEFINING THE STATISTICAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

Statistical information is an important element in the monitoring and evaluation of development programs. It is essential to set up a high-performance statistical information system that provides a good understanding of the specific data requirements of these programs, both in terms of their periodicity and their geographical scope, in order to help formulate coherent and effective development policies. This information must be reliable, relevant, rapid, pertinent, comparable in time and space, and in line with international standards.

In Morocco, the HCP is the main producer of statistical, demographic, economic, and social information. Established in September 2003 as an administrative body, the HCP

enjoys institutional and intellectual independence in setting its programs and conducting its surveys and studies. Since then, the HCP has upgraded its statistical information system in terms of data collection, processing, and dissemination, as well as conceptual and methodological aspects.

The SIS is based, on the one hand, on a system of surveys (demographic surveys, household surveys, population and health surveys, etc.) and censuses (general population and housing census), and on the other hand, on statistics from the day-to-day activities of sectoral administrations (by-product statistics). This system provides a regular, periodic flow of demographic and social information.

The National Statistical Information System (NSIS) adopted by the HCP complies with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS). Since December 15, 2005, Morocco is the 62nd country (3rd in the Middle East) to have subscribed to this standard.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

The Kingdom of Morocco's first statistical structures were set up in 1942 with the creation of a central statistics department. However, the activities of this service remained limited until the end of the 1950s. Previously, statistical information had been dispersed among government departments as a by-product of their management. After its creation, from 1942 to 1957, the Central Statistics Service was responsible for centralizing, processing, and publishing this information. This is how the first official series were published or updated (demographics, foreign trade, etc.). These series aroused the interest of other departments, which felt the need for other information that better met their needs.

Thus, the 1959-1963 period was characterized by the completion of several major basic operations. This statistical work and the resulting studies and analyses took on ever-greater importance, especially as Morocco resolutely embarked on the preparation of economic and social development plans.

After independence, the public authorities felt the need for reliable statistical information and to coordinate and harmonize the various statistical studies. A Statistical Studies Coordination Committee (SSCC) was set up by Dahir No. 1-59-233 on June 30, 1959. It defined the principles of statistical coordination, the obligation to respond to statistical surveys, and statistical confidentiality. A training center for statistical engineers was also set up in Rabat in 1961 to meet the sector's need for managerial staff. In 1975, the central service became the Statistics Department. Decree No. 463-76-2 of August 19, 1975, laid down the organization and responsibilities of this department.

The 1975 decree also created regional delegations to the Ministry of Planning. Within each of these delegations, a statistical service was created, responsible for data collection

and surveys at regional level. In addition, most sectoral departments have set up statistical bodies. They are responsible for carrying out sectoral surveys and, above all, for processing statistics arising from their day-to-day activities.

Morocco's implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) between 1983 and 1992 imposed budget restrictions during this phase, which had a negative impact on statistical operations, especially those of an economic nature. In 1998, a delegation was created under the Prime Minister, responsible for economic forecasting and planning (Dahir No. 1-98-37 of March 16, 1998). This delegation was elevated to the rank of minister in 2002 (Dahir No. 1-00-279 of September 6, 2000). Article 2 of Decree No. 2-02-397 of 2002 assigns it "the collection, analysis, and dissemination of economic statistical information at the national level" (Decree No. 2-02-397 of July 17, 2002).

Since 2003, on the instructions of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the Ministerial Department in charge of Planning within the Government has been set up as a mission administration headed by a High Commissioner for Planning, appointed with ministerial rank by the King. This reform has given the independence of statistics, forecasting and planning, socio-demographic studies, and public policy evaluation a new institutional, functional, and intellectual dimension.

In the field of information and communication technologies, the HCP coordinates the NSIS. According to article N° 2 of Decree No. 2-02-397 of July 17, 2002, establishing the powers and organization of the Ministry of Economic Forecasting and Planning (MEFP), the HCP "Collects, analyzes, and disseminates economic and social statistical information and coordinates the national statistical information system" (Decree No. 2-02-397 of July 17, 2002).

Via its institutional website (<http://www.hcp.ma/>), the HCP puts on line all the data resulting from short- and medium-term economic forecasting surveys and studies through a bouquet of thematic information and documentary watch portals whose watch perimeter also concerns economic development. The National Documentation Center (NDC), instituted by Decree No. 2.97.286 of April 7, 1999, is a central department under the supervision of the HCP, managed under the Autonomously Managed State Services (SSMA) regime. The NDC offers a range of ten information monitoring portals, covering the following areas: tourism and crafts, energy and mining, poverty and human development, business conditions, trade, education and training, industry, agriculture, sea fishing, housing, and urban planning.

It should also be pointed out that since 2003, statistics, along with national accounting, forecasting and planning, has been one of the HCP's main departments, alongside specific bodies that also fall under its authority, such as the National Institute for Business Analysis (NIBA), the Observatory of Living Conditions of the Population (OLCP) and the Center for Demographic Studies and Research (CDSR), the National

Documentation Center (NDC), and the Institute for Business Analysis (IBA), the Observatory of Living Conditions of the Population (OLCP) and the Center for Demographic Studies and Research (CDSR), the National Documentation Center (NDC), the National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (NISAE) and the School of Information Sciences (SIS).

IV. THE MOROCCAN STATISTICAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

Established as Ministry Delegate, then Ministry of Economic Forecasting and Planning, in April 1998 and July 2002, respectively, the Ministerial Department in charge of Planning became HCP in 2003. The Statistics Department (SD) is the core of the NSIS. The SD is a public entity created by Decree No. 2-75-463 of August 19, 1975, and placed under the authority of the HCP. As the central hub of the NSIS, the SD is responsible for carrying out surveys, censuses, and studies in the demographic, economic, and social fields and for collecting demographic and social data. It centralizes all statistics, synthesizes and disseminates them, and ensures the standardization of concepts and the harmonization of statistical methods within the national SIS, their proper use, and the coordination of all statistical work carried out by the various components of this system. It is also responsible for price indices and labor market statistics. The remit and organization of the SD were modified by Decree No. 2-02-397 of July 17, 2002 (article No. 11), setting out the remit and organization of the Ministry of Economic Forecasting and Planning, now the HCP.

Morocco's SIS is highly decentralized. There are statistics departments in each of the major ministries and other bodies outside the SD that collect and publish data. The main producers of statistics identified:

- The National Accounts Department: reporting to the HCP, this department is responsible for drawing up the nation's accounts;
- The Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF): the MEF's Treasury and External Financing Department is responsible for centralizing data sources and producing government statistics (taxation, external debt);
- The Central Bank "Banque Al-Maghrib": a public institution with legal personality and financial autonomy, responsible for collecting and disseminating monetary and exchange rate statistics (Dahir No. 1-59-233 of June 30, 1959);
- The Foreign Exchange Office: responsible for collecting and producing data on foreign trade, the balance of payments, and the international investment position (stock/commitment);
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Fishing;
- The Ministry of Health;
- The Ministry of National Education, Professional Training, Higher Education, and Scientific Research;

- The CDSR, created in 1970, 's mission is to carry out in-depth analysis and research in demographic and socio-economic fields. It also draws up population projections and works to integrate demographic variables into economic and social development planning;
- The OLCP's main mission is to design, analyze, and monitor socio-economic indicators, draw up periodic assessments of the population's living conditions, carry out thematic studies on the living conditions of the population in general and of vulnerable groups in particular, and strengthen collaboration between the various stakeholders in the design of specific studies on living conditions.

V. THE HIGH COMMISSION FOR PLANNING REGIONAL OFFICES

The HCP Regional Offices are created by virtue of the decree of the Minister of Economic Forecasting and Planning No. 1343-02 of July 22, 2002, setting the attributions of the regional offices: carrying out surveys and other information-gathering operations in the fields of statistics and documentation; carrying out economic, social, and demographic studies with a view to promoting regional and local development; contribute, in collaboration with the relevant regional, prefectural, and provincial authorities, to the preparation, monitoring, and evaluation of local and regional economic and social development plans.

The HCP Regional Offices have four departments: Statistics Department, Planning Department, Documentation and Information Department, and Resources Management Department.

A. The Regional Statistical Information System Products

The main products of the RSIS are:

- The General Population and Housing Census (GPHC) databases: Morocco has conducted six such censuses since gaining independence (1960, 1971, 1982, 1994, 2004, 2014 and 2024). The census counts the entire population and housing stock of a given country and collects information on its main characteristics. These are mainly geographic, demographic (legal population, average annual growth rate, age structure, fertility, migration, mortality, etc.), social and economic, as well as household and family characteristics.
- Cartographic Databases: production of maps and geographic data for census and survey purposes; establishment of databases including geography and attribute data to facilitate spatial analysis (poverty maps, thematic maps, etc.); location of basic infrastructures at communal level, in particular schools, health facilities, administrative offices, etc.
- The Regional Database: part of the cooperation program between the HCP and the United Nations Population Fund (UNPA), the Regional Database has the following objectives: strengthen data systems and statistical

indicators at the local level to meet the needs of local development and INDH monitoring; monitoring relevant indicators over time and space; preparation of regional studies and reports; strengthening the Regional Information System.

The themes covered by the Regional Database indicators are demography, population, poverty, standard of living, education and training, health, employment, justice, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, mining and industry, tourism, and crafts.

B. The RSIS: a process still in its infancy

The regional accounts, which are essential for understanding macro-accounting balances, are one component of an information system designed to meet the demand for local data and to provide public and private players with continuous and effective information for decision-making on investment and business start-ups. In addition to these regional accounts, this information system is also designed to meet the multiple requirements of statistical data needed for economic, social, and cultural development planning. It is also essential for monitoring achievements and evaluating the actions undertaken by local players.

Despite efforts to improve the coverage of statistical information and make it available to decision makers, there are still a number of shortcomings. These shortcomings concern key areas such as regional data. Each region of Morocco has its own specific characteristics, but the data provided at the national level does not reflect the differences between levels of development.

In addition, Morocco's policy of regionalization and decentralization has given local authorities increasing responsibility for managing local development, which has led to a growing need for regional and local information. In general, the surveys carried out provide data at the national level and by place of residence (urban, rural). However, these large-scale surveys remain very costly, and the results obtained are often only provided at the national level and by place of residence, which is not sufficient due to regional disparities.

C. Results of National Surveys Not Usable at Local Level

The need to set up a statistical information system at the regional level is dictated by the need to initiate an information system for data collection and processing covering the various entities of the territorial administrative organization. Indeed, the actions undertaken both at the level of diagnosis of regional and local issues and at the level of analysis and elaboration of development strategies and policies largely depend on the availability of quality data satisfying the ambition of decision makers to have statistics at their disposal:

- Accessible: allowing easy access and use of data in a simple, ergonomic way, adapted to the needs of different users;

- Reliable: enabling a faithful and objective description of the reality under study while respecting the statistical procedures required to reduce the universe of possible errors;
- Regular and up to date: produced on a regular basis, with specific deadlines and at precise intervals, statistical information enables longitudinal analyses to be carried out;
- Spatialized: the need for statistical data of a spatial nature (regional, sub-regional, and local statistics) for studies and analyses on issues relating to understanding the dynamics of regional and local economies and the structures of economic geography;
- Relevant: responding exhaustively and impartially to users' needs in the light of changes in the national and international environment.

D. Limited use of ICT for Information Gathering

According to the report drawn up by the magistrates of the Court of Auditors following an audit mission carried out in 2012, "a non-negligible number of errors occur when data collected through the various surveys is entered, due to the large number of questionnaires that have to be filled in manually" (2012: 225). As a result, the use of computer-assisted data collection (CAPI), the widespread use of personal digital assistants (PDAs), and touch-screen tablets in surveys remains limited. The limited use of these information technologies in the statistical field hampers the process of collecting certain data, particularly from companies that now have more technological resources and computer interfaces. Examples of this are the difficulties encountered in filling in questionnaires for companies in structural surveys, business surveys, building, trade, and services surveys, industrial production surveys, and government investment surveys.

E. Results of National Surveys Not Usable at Local Level

The national studies commissioned by the SD do not generally meet the expectations of local authorities in terms of strengthening their specific data. Indeed, the RDs only provide results at the regional level, whereas local partners ask them for more detailed and specific statistical data, i.e., at the provincial and communal level. This requires a significant increase in the sample size for statistical surveys. What's more, the RDs do not have a regional database capable of satisfying the ever-increasing demand for statistical information essential to the programming of regional and local economic and social development actions.

VI. THE SOUSS MASSA REGIONAL DEPARTMENT OF THE HIGH COMMISSION FOR PLANNING

The Souss Massa RDHCP was created on August 19, 1975, and covers the territory of the Souss-Massa region, which comprises two prefectures: Agadir-Ida-Ou-Tanane and Inzegane-Ait Melloul, and four provinces: Taroudannt,

Tiznit, Tata, and Chtouka Aït Baha. Its capital is the prefecture of Agadir-Ida-Ou-Tanane (Decree No. 2-15-40 of February 20, 2015, establishing the number of regions, their names, and their capital cities).



Fig. 1 Administrative Division of the Souss Massa RDHCP

A. Missions, organization, human resources and partners

By virtue of the Head of Government's decree No. 3.186.16 of July 29, 2016, establishing the attributions and organization of the unconcentrated services of the HCP, the Souss-Massa Provincial Office is responsible for the following missions:

- Carrying out surveys and any other information-gathering operations in the field of statistics and processing the results;
- Drawing up and publishing statistical yearbooks and regional and provincial monographs;
- Carry out economic, social, and demographic studies with the aim of contributing to the regional and local development process;
- Participate, in collaboration with the competent regional, provincial, and local authorities, as well as the decentralized services of the various ministries concerned, in the preparation, monitoring, and evaluation of regional, provincial, local, and sectoral development programs;
- Monitor and analyze economic conditions, including labor market conditions, inflation, and prices;
- Collect, analyze, and disseminate documents and information concerning economic and social development at the regional level, and maintain an information watch.

The Souss-Massa Regional Division is headed by a Regional Director. Its head office is in Agadir. It is organized into four departments:

- **Studies and Planning Department:** its mission is to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of development programs at regional and local level. Its main activities include contributing to the preparation, monitoring, and evaluation of economic and social development plans at regional, provincial, and local

levels; carrying out economic, social, and demographic studies with a view to promoting regional and local development; preparing regional and provincial monographs and analyzing the economic and social situation;

- **Regional Statistics and Accounts Department:** its mission is to carry out statistical surveys and any other operation involving the collection and processing of socio-economic and demographic data at regional level. This data is generally collected through surveys (permanent or periodic) of companies, public administrations, and local authorities, households, and statistical by-products from external services of ministries, public establishments, and local and regional authorities; participation in the preparation of regional accounts;
- **Human Resources and General Affairs Department:** its mission is to oversee the day-to-day management of the Regional Division's human resources and general resources. It is responsible for human resources management, financial and logistics management, fleet management, and building maintenance;
- **Documentation and Information Management Department:** its mission is to contribute to the management and safeguard of the regional department's documentation holdings. It is thus responsible for managing the department's documentation (newspapers, books, and periodicals), establishing documentation requirements with a view to their acquisition, distributing the documentation produced by the department at the regional level, managing the documentation holdings of the department's library and making them available to internal and external users, ensuring the proper conservation of documentation, monitoring information, and referencing documentation movements.

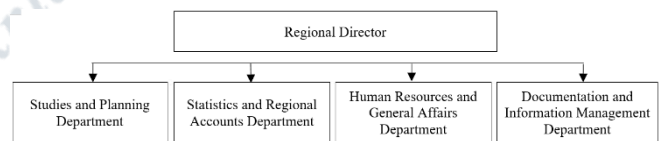


Fig. 2 Organizational chart of The Souss Massa RDHCP

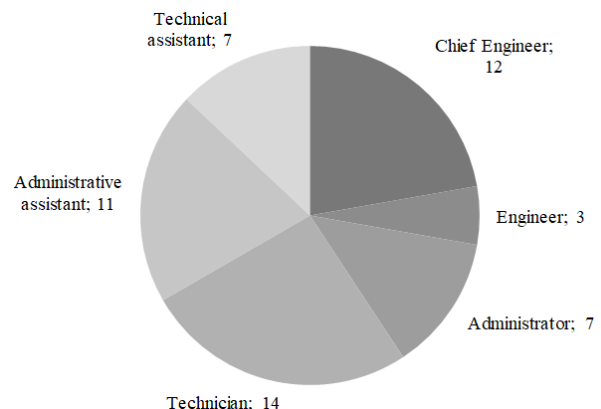


Fig. 3 human resources at the Souss-Massa RDHCP

The Souss Massa RDHCP collaborates with several partners at regional level: external services of ministerial departments; local authorities; public and semi-public establishments; universities and higher education establishments; non-governmental organizations; business sectors and other stakeholders.

VII. DYSFUNCTIONS HINDERING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN SIS SPECIFIC TO THE SOUSS MASSA REGION

A. Statistical Indices are not Representative at Regional Level

National accounts are an essential component of the SIS. They are based on statistical data from a variety of sources. This information is collected and processed in accordance with the principles of the 2008 SNA (accounting structure, concepts, nomenclature, and internationally accepted accounting rules), primarily to meet national needs.

In the absence of a regional accounting framework, the representativeness of national statistical indices is not guaranteed at the regional level. The success of the current regional reform depends on the introduction of a regional statistical information system as a subsystem of the NSIS.

B. Survey Samples Are Not Representative

The national statistical information system needs to be improved and developed to take better account of regional and local data in order to provide useful information, particularly for local authorities in the Souss-Massa region. Survey samples adopted at the national level are insufficient to provide reliable and relevant socio-demographic data for the local authorities of the Souss-Massa region.

C. Late Use and Publication of Survey Results

The RD does not publish its surveys in a timely manner. For example, the survey on communal inventory (Agadir DRHCP), carried out between September 2010 and April 2011, and the survey on production structures in Agadir, carried out between 2008 and 2009, are not made available to potential users. And yet, the results of these surveys are extremely useful for local authorities in the Souss-Massa region in their dealings with government departments and public bodies. Information is a perishable product; if it is not used when the decision-maker needs it, it loses its usefulness.

D. Strengthening the Prerogatives of the HCP's Regional Departments

The effectiveness of the National Statistical Information System remains dependent on decentralizing the procedures for designing, producing, processing, and developing public statistics, which are necessary for formulating appropriate development strategies and defining objectives, as well as for monitoring and evaluation. The eventual aim is to set up genuine regional HCPs that would act as relays for carrying out studies and producing statistics on a regional scale,

backed up and supported by central services.

The implementation of the advanced regionalization policy has been accompanied by an increase in the need for regional and provincial statistical information. In this new context, the Statistics Department medium- and long-term work program must take into account the local and regional dimension in a much more systematic way than in the past. Some basic operations (censuses and surveys) must therefore ensure that their results are regional and provincial in scope.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

Information is not only a management tool but also a production factor, insofar as it helps to inform political and economic decision-makers about the strategic choices they need to make to ensure sustainable, inclusive development. In modern societies, development and information go hand in hand. Statistical information facilitates decision-making, monitoring, and evaluation. Its inadequacy is undeniably a serious impediment to economic and social development. And it is very difficult, if not impossible, to envisage social and economic actions in the absence of relevant, reliable, and up-to-date statistical information.

The Souss-Massa region is currently undergoing both socio-economic and environmental changes. Faced with these transformations, statistical information represents a major challenge for any political, social, or economic action. The regional statistical information system is thus called upon to respond effectively and rapidly to the new demands of sustainable development in the region by producing reliable, relevant, varied, regionalized, and up-to-date data.

The S-M RDHCP is a key player in the implementation of the DS long-term action plan. The department has certainly made significant progress in terms of both quantity (number of operations carried out and areas affected) and quality of information (availability of reliable, regular, and up-to-date information). However, a number of shortcomings remain. These need to be addressed through the implementation of a long-term action plan, focusing essentially on priority actions to improve and develop statistical information.

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