

Report of the ISI Side Event at the 51st Session of the UN Statistical Commission

Effective Communication of Statistics

The ISI Side Event 'Effective Communication of Statistics' which took place during the lunchbreak on 2 March 2020 was attended by 70 delegates.



The moderator, Ada van Krimpen, ISI Director, introduced the events by pointing out that all national statistical offices face the challenge of modernising the communication of statistics. During discussions here at the UN, the need for effective communication with stakeholders, policy makers and the public was emphasized. The volume of information is increasing and the question is do we convey the right information; how to ensure the public trust in our data?

The ISI brought together a group of panellists who will approach the topic from different perspectives.

There were three presentations in this panel:



John Bailer, ISI President and University Distinguished Professor, Department of Statistics, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio: 'Telling the statistics behind the stories and the stories behind the statistics' <https://isi-web.org/images/news/UNSC-ISI-SideEvent-Bailer-02mar2020.pptx>



Rob Bumpstead, Chief of Staff to the UK National Statistician: 'Effective Communication, the UK experience and perspective' <https://isi-web.org/images/news/2020-UNSC-Rob-Bumpstead.pptx>



Mike Ackermans, Senior Director
Communication Statistics Netherlands:
'Communicating statistics: how to make
official statistics relevant to public debate'
[https://isi-web.org/images/news/Mike-
Ackermans-UN-jan-2020.pptx](https://isi-web.org/images/news/Mike-Ackermans-UN-jan-2020.pptx)

After the presentations there was time for questions and answers.

Ms Mercy Kanyuka, Commissioner of Statistics Malawi, asked the panel members' views on how to react in case of negative commentaries in the press. Rob Bumpstead emphasized the need of being completely transparent in your releases and about the methodology that has been used. A release calendar is a necessary tool for gaining public trust. There is easily a perception that the statistical releases are the tool of the government and not politically impartial. A dialogue with opposition leaders to explain the releases and the methodologies can help. On the other hand the office has to keep a sound relationship with the government. This means finding the right balance, which takes a lot of effort.

Mr Abubaker Ismail of SCAD, UAE, said it is important to recruit new and young staff, but young people are not per se interested in joining a statistical office. When you would say 'you will join the Google team' they would run for the same job. So we should make the profession more attractive.

John Bailer mentioned that there is now more interests from students to enter into the statistics and data sciences. Some disciplines do better, like the actuaries. The question is how to make students and graduates interested in official statistics. It is very rare that they have official statistics on the radar. His advice would be for the NSOs to partner with universities and for example co-organise hackathons.

Rob Bumpstead thinks the rich data sources are a strong point for NSO and the fact that one is working on a public good. Developing a data science culture will also help. Stress more the data science, that will make the profession more attractive.

Ms Albina Chuwa, Director General Statistical Office Tanzania, mentions the problem that in some cases the Minister will not use the official statistics. It is our tasks to educate them in using the statistics for sound decision-making.



Mr Gabriel Gamez, UNSD, stressed the importance of data science. It is important to show the users how their lives have improved because of the use of statistics. But we need to differentiate because of the cultural differences. Mike Ackermans replied that statistical literacy is needed and they are building a model for communicating with

statistics. It all starts with the statistical literacy. Statistics is fundamental for the functioning of a democratic society, that is a message that need to be conveyed over and over again.

John Bailer emphasized that it starts with talking to the journalises and making the data accessible for the public, for example what ONS does with giving the opportunity for people to look up their individual life expectancy.

Ada van Krimpen ended the session by thanking the presenters for their extremely interesting contributions and the audience for their questions. The report of the event including the links to the presentations will be published soon.

She finalised by inviting the attendees to the IAOS/ISI conference in Zambia in May 2020 and the ISI WSC 2021 in The Hague, The Netherlands.

Special thanks to Gabriella Vukovich for putting the programme together Tamara Pal for taking the photos.

