

# Challenges of providing outreach services to data users in Uganda; A Case of Uganda Bureau of Statistics

Winny Nekesa Akullo<sup>1</sup>, Godfrey Geoffrey, Nabongo<sup>2</sup> & Patrick Odong<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

Outreach services are one of the possibilities to enhance access to health statistical information. Better mobilization of urban health workers to serve remote or underserved areas as a strategy to improve access to health information to the population in remote and rural areas (WHO, 2012). The outreach services goal of Outreach activities of Statistics Canada is to generate interest and add value to their products and services. This has been achieved by publicizing official statistics not only to increase public awareness, understanding and use data, but also to generate interest and encourage greater numbers of businesses and individuals to answer the agency's surveys (Statistics Canada, 2014).

This paper examines the challenges Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) faces in providing outreach services to data users in Uganda. The objectives of the study were: to examine the outreach services provided by UBOS, the challenges they face in providing the services and proposals for enhancing outreach services to the data users. A total of 10 respondents in UBOS charged with providing outreach services.

An online questionnaires, and interviews were used to collect data from UBOS staff for this research. The study found out that UBOS provides a number of outreach services to its data users to include exhibitions, school outreach programme, training etc. however, it faces challenges of inadequate funding to finance the initiatives and translate the

information into local languages. The study therefore proposes as an institution, UBOS needs to prioritize or allocate funding for the outreach services for it fully achieve its mandate.

**Keywords:** *Outreach, data users, statistical information and Uganda Bureau of Statistics.*

## 1.0 Introduction

The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) was established by the UBOS Act of 1998 as a semi-autonomous body mandated to produce, co-ordinate, supervise, and disseminate official statistics in Uganda. It is the national agency which promotes the production of official reliable statistics and ensures the development and maintenance of the National Statistical System (NSS). In implementing this mandate, UBOS conducts various economic and social surveys and censuses to meet the ever growing demand for statistical data and information for government, the private sector, research institutions and international organizations. UBOS has a Statistical Resource Centre situated at the headquarters in Kampala. In a bid to increase access to data to the users a number of initiatives have been development. Users are demanding for statistical information for research, decision making and dissemination to the other users. This is however, a challenge considering that UBOS cannot reach all the communities and therefore a number of initiatives have been developed.

According to WHO (2012) outreach services are one of the possibilities to enhance access

to health workers and to improve overall retention at country level. Better mobilization of urban health workers to serve remote or underserved areas is a strategy to improve access to health statistical information to the population in remote and rural areas.

According to Wiatrowski (2008) outreach is used for the variety of activities aimed at customers and respondents. Historically, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and other government statistical agencies did little in the way of outreach, assuming that those interested in the available information would find it. With the advent of Internet search tools have made all data more accessible, including BLS statistical data (Wiatrowski, 2008).

The goal of Outreach activities of Statistics Canada is to generate interest and add value to their products and services. This has been achieved by publicizing official statistics not only to increase public awareness, understanding and use data, but also to generate interest and encourage greater numbers of businesses and individuals to answer the agency's surveys (Statistics Canada, 2014).

## **1.2 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study were to:

- i. examine the outreach services provided by Uganda Bureau of Statistics;
- ii. challenges faced in providing the outreach services
- iii. propose measures to improve outreach services by UBOS

## **1.3 Justification of the study**

To improve the outreach services by UBOS to data users; this study will draw attention of Uganda Bureau of Statistics on proposals on

various outreach services to support and promote use of data at all levels.

## **2.0 Literature review**

### **2.1 Outreach services**

Statistics Finland recognizes that for the public to acquire knowledge from the information provided by the numbers produced by the office they must help those users understand the metadata and the methodology. In addition partnerships with educational institutions have been established to facilitate professional development of teachers in the short term and long term capacity building (Townsend, 2008).

On the other hand, the American Statistical Association (ASA) has increased statistical literacy in youth and with guidance from the National Agriculture in the Classroom organization developed a Food Preference Survey lesson, activities, and extensions that build on the existing ASA Census at School survey with an agricultural tie-in. The lesson teaches and addresses common core standards for grades 5-8 in Mathematics, Language Arts, Nutrition, Social Studies, National Family and Consumer Sciences. Students complete a brief online survey, analyze their class census results, and compare their class with random samples from students in the United States and other countries (USDA, 2017).

The Illinois Statistics Office in addition provides advanced statistical consulting and cutting-edge research support for planning studies, developing the statistical models and analyzing the data. The Office consults with university researchers and administrative units, private and public companies and government organizations. They provide targeted statistical methods development as

well as established best-practice analysis (Illinois Statistics Office, 2016).

Statistics Finland has been providing fee-based training for its customers for 20 years. The courses are primarily intended for researchers, teachers and librarians, or generally for anyone in the public or private sector who has to work with statistics (Townsend, 2008).

The Portuguese Central Statistics Office (CSO) has teamed up with Sociedade Portuguesa de Estatística (The Portuguese Statistics Society) <http://www.spestatistica.pt/> and Lifetime Lab [www.lifetimelab.ie](http://www.lifetimelab.ie) to bring you Exploristica – Adventures in Statistics, a fun way of learning about mathematics and statistics. Exploristica is a new and exciting CSO education outreach project that allows young people to explore statistics and probability through games. Exploristica was launched on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015 World Statistics Day at Lifetime Labs in Cork City. Exploristica makes its first public appearance at the Cork Science Festival in City Hall, Cork City on November 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015 (The Central Statistics Office, 2014).

Stats SA's key goals involve broadening the role and reach of official statistics and information should enable citizens, the government and business to understand and change society, and the important role that numbers play in this context emphasizes the importance and use of official statistics. Statistics Stats SA has an ISibalo capacity building programme that places a high priority on social outreach and supports communities and a number of initiatives (Stats SA, 2017).

## **2.2 Challenges faced in providing the outreach services**

Roodenbeke, Lucas, Rouzaut, and Bana (2011) observe that developing countries still face technological barriers which minimize the value of outreach services. Such barriers are reported as; internet connectivity, interoperability or access to infrastructure, and the costs associated with the technology.

Statisticians working in government statistical offices face the challenge in communicating their numbers, called official statistics. Thus the picture of the summary statistics from those areas of knowledge that the public gets is as good as the media, those web pages, the educational system or the government are at conveying the numbers, unless the statisticians in those areas of knowledge take the time and effort themselves to educate the public directly on the numbers they produce.

The sector strategic plan for statistics 2007-2012 reports key challenges as originating from socio-economic, political and technological environments of Uganda.

The challenges are highlighted as follows; demand for small area estimates (district level, sub county, community data), proliferation of data producers in the market economy, high demand for gender, labour, and governance statistics, matching data production with the policy making cycle, Market Liberalization, reaching out to all users, ensuring standards and timeliness in submission of secondary data by the relevant government agencies (migration, education, health, crime, energy, labour and employment, and businesses), poorly generated, delayed and incomplete returns from districts to the ministries, lack of objectivity in data generated at the district level by planning, limited information on

existing data, and improper use of information (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

### **2.3 Strategies to improve the provision of outreach services to data users**

In an attempt to increase statistical literacy in the schools sector and promote greater understanding, knowledge and access to statistics by teachers, school librarians and students with a particular emphasis on ABS statistics, the Australian Bureau of Statistics ABS developed a set of criteria to include; data awareness, the ability to understand statistical concepts, ability to analyze, interpret and evaluate statistical information and ability to communicate statistical information and understand (Townsend, 2008)

Statistics New Zealand on the other hand has increased its investment in both internal and external statistics training over the last few years. In order to ensure increased general capability in the community to use statistics resulting in better decision making in addition to partnership arrangement with statistics educators (Townsend, 2008).

In addition, the Italian National Institute of Statistics has a web page for statistical literacy called "For students" (<http://www.istat.it/servizi/studenti/>) which provides students, with a guide to data and methodologies adopted at national and international level. The goal of this website is to make official statistics familiar to the students through the co-operation between the school and the university. In this students' page, Istat makes available tools for understanding and using statistics and provides information about how the activities can be carried out (Townsend, 2008).

The Malaysian Statistics Office has developed efforts for the engagement with Data Providers/Respondents, in order to increase better comprehension and understanding of the data requirement. This exercise has contribute to better response rate as well as improved data quality. In addition, the agency has focused on collaboration with other government agencies and the private sectors including higher education institutional to increase research, data sharing, and analysis and to reduce respondents' burden (Hasan, 2012).

Ideally, statisticians in every area of knowledge that uses Statistics should be responsible for making the public statistically literate with respect to the numbers they produce, at least at a basic level. But that is far from what takes place in most cases (Giovannini & Uysal, 2006).

## **3.0 Methodology**

The respondents where purposively selected for this study. Data for this study was collected using an online questionnaire and interviews with some of the workers of the Bureau

An online structured questionnaire was administered to 10 respondents and only 6 questionnaires were received giving a response rate of 60%.

## **4.0 Findings and Discussions**

### **4.1 Statistical Information that UBOS disseminates.**

Uganda Bureau of Statistics produces and disseminates a number of statistics in the mentioned areas below;

- Business statistics
- Agricultural statistics
- Crime statistics
- Environmental statistics
- Gender statistics
- Labour statistics

- Macro-Economic statistics
- Social statistics
- Socio-economic statistics
- Statistical abstracts
- Trade statistics

As the official producers of statistics in the Uganda, UBOS is required to produce and disseminate different kinds of statistics to inform government and different stakeholders.

#### **4.2 Users of Statistical Information**

Among the users of statistical information as mentioned by the respondents include;

- Ministries, Departments and Agencies
- Local governments
- Academies,
- Development partners
- Private sector
- Statistical societies
- NGO's
- Researchers and University students
- public in general

These need the statistical information for various reasons including decision making, research and funding purposes etc.

#### **4.3 Outreach services provided by UBOS to data users**

In a bid to reach out to the communities, UBOS provides the following outreach services to the data users;

Schools outreach programmes which is aimed at providing schools with easy to read statistical publications and charts.

Establishment of regional services; UBOS has established two regional offices in Western and Northern Uganda in order to bring the services closer to the people.

Deposit of statistical data in public and community libraries; in order to have an inclusive community, UBOS deposits its statistical publications to the public and community libraries for the public to easily access.

Workshops and seminars; another important outreach services are the workshops and seminars where the public and media are invited for data releases and during those workshops statistics is shared on leaflets.

Exhibitions; these are very important to increase awareness and visibility in the public domain, at such exhibitions, UBOS displays and gives out data and publications on CDs, flash disks or hard copies to the people who visit their stall.

Statistical publications delivery to organizations, MDAs and public offices, once statistics are presented in workshops or seminars, the publications are then delivered to various institutions to provide access to wider public.

Talkshows; as the communication team moves to various districts to mobilize and sensitize the communities about the UBOS programmes, they also have talk shows to inform the communities about their products and how they can access them.

Trainings; a number of trainings have been conducted by UBOS to provide both basic and technical statistical trainings to its users and stakeholders in order for them to appreciate statistics and use it for their daily work.

#### **4.4 Challenges that UBOS faces in providing Outreach services to data users**

Three of the respondents indicated that although they would like to extend the outreach services at the grassroots they still have a challenge of inadequate funds, because most of the programmes need funding.

Another respondent indicated that the users still have the statistics phobia, so they don't want to see numbers but probably pictures and diagrams

Another respondent indicated that timing of the programmes to bring to the communities especially in the rural areas is still a big problem considering that majority of these rural communities are agriculturalists and always in the fields farming.

Two of the respondents also expressed the issue of the language barrier considering that the statistical information is in English and most of the people from the rural communities have high illiteracy rates which affects their access to these data.

#### **4.5 Proposals to improve on the outreach services**

Five of the respondents proposed to make statistics user friendly so that the public can relate to them in friendly way than shunning them.

Five of the respondents also emphasized the need to translate statistics in the commonly known local languages for those communities to access them and make it easier to hold their leaders accountable.

Another respondent also proposed the announcing in advance when the outreaches will be held in the communities of operation. In addition to advertisement of the outreach programmes before carrying out.

On the other hand, one of the respondent wasn't contented with the outreach services and proposed that *"We need to reach even to the smallest units i.e. village. Most of these services are on regional and regional or district level"*

#### **5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

The findings show that the Uganda Bureau of Statistics produces and disseminates various statistics which are used for evident decision making and research, the Bureau has a number of outreach services it provides to the

data users which include school outreach programmes, exhibitions, and regional offices, deposit of statistical publications in public and community libraries among others.

In addition, the librarians who are custodians of the statistical information also require basic statistical training to enable them to disseminate and provide the statistical information adequately to the data users in their libraries.

The outreach services have been appreciated, the target being the local committees away from the city, therefore there is need to translate some of the statistical information to enable the locals attach more meaning to the data.

Uganda Bureau of Statistics would also want to improve and increase its outreach services to the data users, however, they face budget constraints which limits initiatives. As an institution, UBOS needs to prioritize or allocate funding for the outreach services for it fully achieve its mandate.

#### **About the Authors**

1. Winny Nekesa Akullo  
Senior Library & Client Support  
Officer  
Public Procurement and Disposal of  
Public Assets Authority  
[winny.nekesa@yahoo.com](mailto:winny.nekesa@yahoo.com)
2. Godfrey Geoffrey Nabongo,  
Manager, Communication and PR  
Uganda Bureau of Statistics  
[gnabongo@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:gnabongo@yahoo.co.uk)
3. Patrick Odong  
Librarian  
Uganda Christian University,  
[patodong@gmail.com](mailto:patodong@gmail.com)

## References

1. Giovannini, E., & Uysal, A. (2006). Statistics, Knowledge and Policy: What Do We Know About What People Know? *OECD WORKSHOP ON BUSINESS AND CONSUMER TENDENCY SURVEYS*. Retrieved March 2017, from <http://www.oecd.org/site/worldforum06/38445087.pdf>
2. Hasan, R. (2012). Challenges faced by the National Statistics Office Department of Statistics, Malaysia. *13th East Asian Statistical Conference (5-7 November)*.
3. Illinois Statistics Office. (2016). Statistical Consulting and Research. Illinois. Retrieved April 2017, from <http://www.stat.illinois.edu/statconsulting/>
4. Statistics Canada. (2014). External communications and outreach. Retrieved April 2017, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-634-x/2016001/section4/chap2-eng.htm>
5. The Central Statistics Office. (2014). Exploristica – Adventures in Statistics. Retrieved April 2017, from <http://www.cso.ie/en/interactivezone/exploristicaadventuresinstatistics/>
6. Townsend, M. (2008). Efforts of Statistical Offices across the World to Complement School Curricula. Retrieved April 2017, from <http://iase-web.org/islp/documents/Media/ASA-2008.pdf>
7. USDA. (2017). Outreach and Education. Retrieved April 2017, from [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Education\\_and\\_Outreach/Lesson\\_Plans/](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Education_and_Outreach/Lesson_Plans/)
8. Stat SA. (2017). Overview; Statistics South Africa. Retrieved March 2017, from
9. <https://nationalgovernment.co.za/units/view/43/Central-Government-Administration/Statistics-South-Africa-Stats-SA>
10. Wiatrowski, W. J. (2008, October). Customer and Respondent Outreach Initiatives of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved 2017 April, from <https://www.bls.gov/osmr/pdf/st080080.pdf>