∫ Executive Summary

The purpose of this business case was to provide advice to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on the optimal means of increasing the capability of the statistical community of the Pacific Islands Countries and Territories (PICTs) through the use of technology. It was also undertaken to provide advice on structuring the National Statistics Strategy (NSS) Hand Book for web access, particularly in the context of making it accessible to developing nations such as the Pacific Islands.

What NEXUS discovered about the PICTs in general.
- English is effectively the *lingua franca* for business and for NSOs throughout the PICTs.
- High risk of lack of interest in a new project.
- Aversion to change may be prevalent.

What NEXUS has discovered about the PICTS and their Internet and computer capabilities.
- All Islands now have some Internet access. Even Pitcairn Island (with a population of 47) has one server. Most (possibly all) NSOs now have some access to the Internet.
- However, given that many only have one server, the connection costs are uncompetitive (as high as US$10 per hour).
- Progress seems rapid and high-speed connections are likely to occur soon.
- Computer hardware is relatively modern in many, some with laptops.

Main recommendations
- Capitalising on the **ABS's current technological capabilities** and state of the art Learning Management System, it is recommended that the LMS be the primary method for enhancing the capabilities of the PI statistical community, and will thus be the focus of this report. Specific recommendations regarding the LMS and web portal interface:
  - Specific user interface for the Pacific Islands.
  - Small modules- due to low bandwidths.
  - The LMS is also capable of being combined with other delivery methods (it's not just e-learning): virtual classroom, electronic whiteboards, web cams, information on regional forums and seminars, project work etc. This capability should be utilised for the PI users as well, but would require someone from the region to

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provide the relevant information to someone at the ABS who could then create the necessary links or post relevant information.

- Different **methods of dissemination** of the ABS LMS will be used to accommodate for disparities in IT capabilities: CD-ROM for users without Internet (or with slow connections), Online LMS for faster connections.

- **Partnership** with regional organisations that are also keen to strengthen regional ties, to reap greater efficiencies in training, particularly SIAP's Outreach Program and the SPC.

- Maintain **long-term view** of project, acknowledging that while many technological issues hamper the process now, the ABS will be establishing a system that will continue to develop over the years, and generating valuable skills both within and outside the ABS.

- A **concerted marketing** effort will be required to inform NSO managers about the potential of the LMS and gather their feedback on their specific requirements to increase a sense of ownership, hence encouraging participation and use. Marketing (to create awareness, gain acceptance and to teach people how to use the LMS)
  - o Introductory seminars
  - o Brochures
  - o Website (or some introductory section on the LMS)
  - o CD-ROM with simplified prototype of Portal, LMS, CF, VC

- **Feedback** sought and implemented as much as possible. The ABS LMS already has a helpdesk service provided within it but the ABS may be interested in setting up a system that allows users to make comments and suggestions about the LMS and it's content. This could allow the ABS to monitor the use of the LMS and also provide them with the means for adjusting some things to suit the needs of its users.

- **Appropriate Content**. The Pacific Islands have a diverse range of needs but course material is limited to what the ABS has developed due to licensing issues. This will therefore constitute the backbone of services provided to the PICTs. The suite of courses made available to the PICTs will hopefully be expanded with the inclusion of courses from other organisations such as SIAP. Leadership and Management Skills training is the lowest priority of the three main streams of training conducted by the ABS.

Main Risks

1. Lack of interest in project – due to lack of involvement and sense of ownership, and too much other work or training to do.
2. Hesitation about engaging in new procedures due to general resistance to change or caution about the viability of the particular project.
3. Failure to secure a partnership with SIAP or other funding facilitator

Solutions

1. Involvement and active participation of PICTs. Provide certification for completion of training modules, to act as a partial incentive for participation. Provide added incentives for participation and achievement in training courses, such as promotions and travel to undertake further training. Use own country examples when training.

2. Emphasise the cost benefits, flexibility of the training, the possibilities for the future, and the overall value of greater access to information and resources.

3. Regional 'echo-training.' A tiered system of training the first five—they train next five, and so on, to save on costs.

Other Issues

- An ongoing HRM problem for PICT NSOs is staff turnover once training is completed.
  Approach: Further incentives for staff who undergo training under the PISCES project might include contractual agreements to stay on for a certain period, and for those that undertake Trainer training, to agree to pass on skills in their home country.

- Possible perception of cultural imperialism.
  Approach: Partnering with the SPC and having them (as well as PICT managers) involved early in the user requirements process. Tailored interface for PI users of LMS.

- Likelihood of different levels of participation by the NSOs, possible communication breakdowns and lack of feedback, and general loss of momentum.
  Approach: Regular newsletters, and perhaps even workshops (online when feasible), and even regular meetings/seminars in the early stages to ease the transition between face-to-face learning and e-learning styles.

Conclusion

- The project is a low cost, low risk venture for the ABS, which offers high rewards for the ABS and the PICTs.

- There are risks that may hamper the project itself, but with a degree of commitment from the ABS, these obstacles should be overcome.

- Nexus recommends that the ABS proceed with the project and make full use of any cooperation offered by other organisations to expand the scope of services provide by the LMS (hence keeping the ABS' costs down and the effectiveness of the LMS up).