

Successful Completion of Population Estimates and Projections Workshop

Last week has been an intense, yet a very fulfilling week of learning and partnerships within Tonga's National Statistical System (TNSS), as well as the Pacific's, through a workshop that was led by StatsNZ in co-facilitation with the South Pacific Community (SPC). This workshop was a face-to-face training in Nuku'alofa on producing official population estimates and projections for Tonga.

The key participants were the **data providers** for this exercise, namely the Ministry of Health (live birth and death data), Ministry of Justice (civil registration of births and deaths data), Ministry of Customs and Revenue (migration data), as well as the **producer** of the official population estimates and projections, which is the Tonga Statistics Department (TSD), and one of the **main users** of this product, which is the Ministry of Education. A staff from the Cook Islands Statistics Office also joined this workshop in person.

The workshop was launched on 13 February 2023 with an opening prayer led by Rev. Tevita Tapueluelu and followed by a welcoming speech conducted by the Acting Government Statistician, Mr. Sione Lolohea. The chief guest, H. E. Matthew Howell then delivered the keynote address, where he highlighted that New Zealand supports this work because of the clear value official statistics bring to Tonga, such as official population estimates and projections. He continued to state, *"A clear understanding of Tonga's population and demographic trends will assist across government's decision making and understanding both where Tonga is, and where it's heading"*.

Dr. Ofa Afuha'amango Ketu'u, the Manager for the Pacific Statistics Program, StatsNZ, continued with a brief introduction of the workshop's objectives and agenda for the week, and stressed the importance of the partnerships amongst the stakeholders within the Statistical System. Concluding the opening ceremony was a thank you note delivered by Mele Taumoepeau, Assistant Government Statistician.

The first day of the workshop focused on identifying the information needs and priorities for population estimates and projections for Tonga, across key Tongan Government partners, stakeholders and customers. This includes the current and potential usage of population estimates and projections in Tonga as a whole.

On the second day, the participants looked at case studies from the neighboring countries and international organizations, specifically on the way they produce population estimates and projections, including New Zealand, Cook Islands, SPC and the United Nations.

Moving on to day three, the focus was shifted back to Tonga in identifying the key and potential data sources for this exercise. Representatives from both Ministry of Health and Justice shared the current process for collecting birth and death data in their respective ministries, and also highlighted some of the challenges they face with hoping they can be improved by closer collaborations and cooperations amongst all relevant parties.

On the fourth day, the participants were trained on the methods and software options for producing population estimates and projections, and finished off with practical some exercises and experiments.

The last day of the workshop focused on assessing the quality of the product and the importance of reporting and disseminating the results, as well as documenting the data sources and methods applied. Dr. Ofa Afuha'amango Ketu'u concluded the workshop by awarding the participants

certificate of completion and re-emphasized the importance of building a strong and positive partnership amongst the stakeholders.

TSD would like to thank the New Zealand Government, StatsNZ and SPC for their continuous support in funding and conducting this very important workshop. TSD is confident that with the skills and knowledge gained this week, they are ready to produce Tonga's official population estimates and projections for 2023.

A special malo 'aupito to all the facilitators! Thank you for willing to share your time, knowledge and skills with us. To all the stakeholders and participants who attended this workshop, malo 'aupito e kau mai! May we continue to support each other and work closely together to produce a reliable official population estimates and projections for Tonga!

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