

Statistics And The Media - The Nigerian Experiment

O. O. AJAYI

DataStream Information Bureau

E-Mail: ooajayi@infoweb.abs.net

INTRODUCTION

The role of statistics in the development of a nation cannot be over-emphasized and because this crucial role statistics plays, it ought to be developed by modern nations. Everybody should be involved in the statistical development of a country including the suppliers of statistical data (the respondents), the users of statistical products, the producers (Statistical workers) and, a special group, the media which is always referred out as the fourth estate of the realm. The special position that the media occupies in statistical development is one important reason why national statistical offices should work closely with the media so that the media could undertake publicity to popularize statistics and help to build statistical culture in the nation, solicit for cooperation by the respondents on statistical programmes (surveys, censuses, etc.) and encourage usage of statistics by the society through efficient dissemination of statistical products using their channels and finally learning techniques of statistical analysis and interpretation so as to be in a position to write appropriate stories behind the figures. In order to assist the media to properly play the key roles specified above, there is need to adequately train the media practitioners on the essential statistical processes. Running a workshop for the media is such a fundamental activity to positively change the attitude of the society to the statistical product - its production and usage and should be of very high priority. It is indeed an important element in the strategy for statistical development in our countries. It was for this reason that Nigerian Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) started running workshops for the media since 1995 and four annual workshops had been held up-to-date (1995, 1996, 1997, 1998).

The objectives established for the workshop series included:

- (i) Acquainting media men with the role of statistics in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes in all sectors of human development.
- (ii) Empowering the media through knowledge to create statistical awareness for government units and the people of the country about the benefits of statistical data in the development process. In other words, the media is empowered to promote statistical culture in the country.

Integrating the media agencies into the National Statistical System as agents of publicity for statistical activities and survey programmes, as users of statistical products undertaking appropriate analysis that enables them write stories emanating from the figures.

- (iv) Giving awareness and understanding to the media on the processes and procedures for data production so that the public in turn becomes aware of what goes into the building up of a statistical information system in a country.
- (v) Building up the capacity of the media men to correctly interpret data and to equally use data appropriately.

The scope was to cover all areas touching on frequently used statistics which are required to support social and economic development planning. These are in the areas of Prices, Trade, Agriculture, Employment and Economic statistical aggregates. The topics that had been traditionally covered included the following:

- Processes and conditionalities of data production.
- Managing data production programmes.
- Measurement of Inflation using the Consumer Price Index (C P I).
- Concepts, definitions of Employment and Methodology for generating employment statistics
- Procedure for production of the National Accounts Statistics.
- Methods of compilation of foreign trade statistics.
- Production methods of selected social Indicators.
- Methods of Production of Agricultural Statistics.
- Concepts and understanding of population statistics (population census procedures).
- Analysis of financial and monetary statistics.

- Statistics and Total Quality Management (TQM).
- Expectations and views of media men on statistical outputs.

These topics had been presented at the very basic levels to ensure understanding of the methods, concepts and definitions.

The target group that were involved were Senior Journalists from the print, electronic (tv and radio), news agencies and other media outfits throughout the country from both government and private sectors. Also included in the interactive training were National Statistical Agencies, Central Bank and International media agencies like Reuter.

METHODOLOGY

The presentations were made using visual aids and plenary discussions were held on all the presentations. Media men served as rapporteurs, discussants and also as authors of some section papers. Indeed authors came from both the government agencies and the media houses. A communiqué was issued at the end of each workshop which presented the observations, conclusions and recommendations emanating from the discussions and all media houses widely carried the communiqué. The various statistical agencies also used the workshop fora to discuss their outputs and distributed all the outputs to the participants for dissemination through their media houses. Also the occasions of the workshops were used for media interviews which were carried by the newspapers, on the radio and on the television and these interviews on statistical matters were aired nationally, Certificates of participation were usually issued to the media men. The workshop format was to run for about 3 days and fully paid for by the National Statistical Office and should usually hold outside the capital city. The Proceedings of the workshop were always quickly compiled and disseminated to the media houses, International agencies and other national organizations.

Other initiatives undertaken to bring the media to participate in the national Statistical System included the National Statistical Office giving press briefings at the beginning of each year where previous year progress and new year programme of work were given to the media audience. A luncheon was usually given after the briefing sessions. Other initiatives were to employ media men into the dissemination branch of the statistical agency and were usually trained on how to handle statistical data and also serve as liaison between the office and media houses. One other component was to encourage the media houses to organize in-house capacity building programmes with the assistance of the statistical agencies.

In conclusion, National Statistical Offices should initiate actions to bring the media into the National Statistical System and define very clearly their roles in the system. They represent a potent force which when appropriately deployed could play very critical and significant role in the development of the national information system. Some of the experiments carried out in Nigeria bore very good fruits and they are recommended for adoption by National Statistical Authorities the world over.