

# Challenges of Decentralization in the Philippine Statistical System<sup>1</sup>

Romulo Aguilar Virola

*National Statistical Coordination Board*

*Midland Buendia Bldg, 403 Sen. Gil J. Puyat Avenue*

*Makati City, Philippines*

*ra.virola@nscb.gov.ph*

## 1. Introduction

Since its reorganization in 1987, the Philippine Statistical System (PSS) has operated as a decentralized system where data production is undertaken by all government agencies and instrumentalities at all administrative levels. The major surveys and censuses are conducted by the National Statistics Office, which is tasked with the generation of general-purpose statistics. Other agencies conduct sector-specific surveys and maintain administrative recording systems which are rich sources of information on specific sectors. The Bureau of Agricultural Statistics in the Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics in the Department of Labor and Employment are the two biggest statistical units in the line ministries. The Statistical Research and Training Center (SRTC) acts as the research and training arm of the PSS although its limited resources allow it to focus mainly on training. The National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) serves as the highest policymaking and coordinating body of the PSS

In practice, the NSCB has faced many challenges as well as opportunities in fulfilling its mandate. The non-statistical agencies have responded very positively to the coordination work of the NSCB; but the NSCB sometimes encounters difficulties with some statistical agencies.

In 1991, the Local Government Code (LGC) was passed which sought to carry out basic structural reforms in governance and in the delivery of public service geared towards countryside development. The goal was to transform the different geo-political units called local government units (LGUs) into self-governing and self-reliant components of the Philippine society. Its implementation entailed the decentralization and devolution of powers, functions and accountabilities to the LGUs to hasten development and enhance the efficiency in the delivery of basic services to the citizenry. The devolved functions included the generation of statistics.

The availability of sound information is, of course, an important ingredient in local development planning and governance. Even before the enactment of the LGC, the PSS has recognized the increasing demand for quality data needed for subnational planning, policy formulation and decision making. Thus, it advocated the development of the subnational statistical system as a major thrust in the Philippine Statistical Development Program (PSDP), 1990-1995, a policy that

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has been carried forward to succeeding versions of the PSDP.

The passage of the LGC in 1991 spawned new challenges to the PSS not only in terms of new data demands but also in terms of institutional changes in the generation of statistics. These new challenges raised additional demands on the coordination work of the NSCB.

## **2. Philippine Statistical System's Response to Decentralization**

As the coordinator of a decentralized system, the NSCB has put in place several mechanisms to enhance the delivery of statistical products and services. These mechanisms are geared towards a systematic generation of the needed statistics which minimizes duplication of efforts but at the same time ensures the relevance of the PSS and guarantees the adoption of standard concepts, definitions and methodologies in the production of statistics. Some of these mechanisms are the following:

- The Philippine Statistical Development Program- a five-year rolling blueprint of statistical activities to be undertaken by the various government agencies that articulates the data requirements of the Philippine Medium-Term Development Plan and is formulated thru consultative meetings with various sectors;
- The System of Designated Statistics- a mechanism laid out thru an executive order signed by the President of the Philippines that lists the statistical activities and the statistics that should be generated by the PSS with the specified frequency, level of disaggregation, time lag and responsible agency;
- The Survey Review and Clearance System- a process thru which all surveys and censuses to be conducted by or for the government are reviewed and approved before they can be conducted;
- The Standards and Classification Systems- a list of classification systems to be adopted by government in the production of statistics;
- The Interagency Committees and Working Groups- bodies created to address specific/sectoral statistical issues with representation from concerned groups, including the academe and the private sector;
- The Policy Resolutions of the NSCB- a compilation of policy issuances of the NSCB as the highest policy-making body on statistical matters;
- The Statistical Frameworks- frameworks developed and maintained to generate macro indicators and which serve as important tools for statistical coordination;
- The Subnational Statistical Coordination Committees- multi-sectoral committees created at the subnational level to provide direction in the development of the subnational statistical system with guidance from the policy issuances of the NSCB;
- The National Statistical Information Center- a network of one-stop shops of information products and services which attempts to facilitate data gathering in a decentralized statistical system;
- The Government Statistics Accessibility Program- which promotes best practices in information dissemination by all the component agencies of the PSS thru the

formulation of dissemination standards such as the General Standards on Statistical Information Dissemination which requires, among others, the dissemination of Advance Release Calendars; and

- The celebration of the National Statistics Month, the National Convention on Statistics, etc.- activities sponsored thru the collaboration, coordination and cooperation of the PSS component agencies that promote statistics to the public.

In addition, the devolution of services under the LGC, such as those rendered by the Departments of Health, Social Welfare and Development, Tourism, Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources, Public Works and Highways, Education, Culture and Sports and Transportation and Communication has brought about new issues in the generation of statistics. Prior to the implementation of the LGC, the NSCB needed to coordinate primarily with the central offices of these departments; now, the NSCB has to deal with the LGUs as well.

Amidst these challenges, the need to develop statistical capacity must likewise be addressed. In this regard, the SRTC has included in its training agenda a subnational orientation that caters to the training demands of statistical personnel in the LGUs. It is very encouraging that the LGU response to the training offered by the SRTC to their personnel has been positive.

### **3. Future Challenges**

While efforts are ongoing to address the data requirements resulting from the decentralization of governance, the resource constraints of a developing country will continue to raise challenges for the statistical system. Much remains to be done. In the Philippine context, these challenges will be foremost in the following areas:

- Manpower development – The lack of trained statisticians specially in the LGUs remains a stumbling block that needs to be hurdled before quality statistics can be produced and used at the subnational level. In addition, there is a need to strengthen the statistical capacity of non-statistical agencies. While the major statistical agencies comprising the PSS have developed sufficient statistical capacity, there are still many agencies of government with inadequately-trained statistical personnel.
- Educating the data users- Important outputs of statistical agencies remain underutilized because users simply do not know how to use them. Statistical offices must therefore take on the responsibility of creating demand for statistical services. Toward this end, statistical agencies must pursue a regular program of user-producer dialogue aimed at enhancing appreciation of each other's role in the improvement of statistical services.
- Improving the accessibility of statistics- A persistent issue that hinders the development of the subnational statistical system is the inconsistent practice among the various ministries/departments on the release of statistics by their subnational offices. This leads to conflicting statistics between those available in the central office and those available in the subnational offices, as well as delays when the release of statistics is centralized.

Maybe one of the reasons statistics have not been as popular as they should be is the fact that statistical offices have not put much importance to the dissemination and accessibility of the statistics they have!

- Enhancing the image of the statistical agencies- As is the case in many countries, work must be done to create a more positive image for the statistical agencies. This aspect has been largely ignored or not given enough attention by statisticians, but the overall quality of official statistics has suffered partly because of the negative public perception of how statistical agencies function.
- Convincing government and the private sector to invest in statistics- Unquestionably, the demand for statistics has risen n-folds in recent years. Unfortunately, neither the government nor the private sector has responded adequately to the logistical requirements of these emerging demands. Obviously, there is a need to strike an appropriate balance between the demand for and the willingness to invest in statistics.

## **REFERENCES**

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## **RESUME**

Le Systeme Philippine de Statistiques (SPS) est un systeme decentralise ou plusieurs agences gouvernement aux produisent toutes sortes d'imformation. Le National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), etant l'agence la plus importante dans la formulation des decisions et dans le role de coordonnateur dans SPS, se trouve en face des difficultes et des opportunités. Il a mis en place plusieurs mecanismes oriente vers une generation systematique des statistiques qui minimise le doublement des efforts, assure la relevance du SPS et garantie la standardisation des idées, definitions, et methodologies. La mise en place du code de gouvernement local en 1991 a exige' la decentralisation de pouvoirs et la responsabilite de repondre aux besoins d'unites de gouvernements locales pour acclereler le developement de regions dans les provinces. Les roles devolues contiennent la generation de statistiques qui a soulevés d'autres exigences pour le NSCB. Bien qu'on fait de grands efforts pour repondres aux exigences de "data" de decentralisation, les contraintes financiers d'un pays du tier monde continue a faire des difficultes pour le systeme statistique. Dans le cadre philippine, ces difficultes sont plus signifians dans les domaines suivant: le developement d'un force ouvrier technique, la formation des utilisateurs de data, l'amelioration de l'acces aux statistiques, la creation d'un bon image pour les agences de statistiques, et l'encouragement de l'investissement publique et prive dans les statistiques.