

A PRIVATE SECTOR VIEW OF HOW DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS CAN BETTER SERVE BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

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As the Conference Moderator, Dr. Burton T. Oñate, has pointed out in his "conference base" paper:

"A sound statistical system is a basic requirement for effective planning and development."

And the purpose of the dialogue between producers and users of development indicators is to:

"— enhance the quality of data in terms of its relevance and usefulness, accuracy and reliability, timeliness and consistency."

I am not sure that, after the very professional exchanges that you have listened to this morning, there is anything useful that I — a layman-user of development indicators and other social and economic statistics — can add that will better enable this Conference to achieve its purpose.

But perhaps it may be useful for the Conference participants to back off a bit from the technical considerations which the presented papers have mainly concerned themselves with — as Dr. Oñate has described these considerations: from the producers side, "concepts and definitions, coverage and scope, and details of data contents", as well as the "strengths and limitations of data generated"; and from the users side, "their versions of the quality of data and the gaps in the statistical system."

As a layman-user of development indicators and other social and economic statistics, let me make some suggestions — directed

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towards producers, sources and users of statistics on how development indicators can better serve both the government and the private sector. You have noted that I have added "sources" to "producers and users". Although they are not directly represented in your conference, their importance is recognized by Dr. Oñate, who had concluded his paper by stating that "— an important dimension of this dialogue is the understanding and cooperation of the respondents — without this cooperation, the data generated by the producers which are passed on to the users will be of poor quality." You will also have noted that Dr. Tito A. Mijares, Executive Director of the National Census and Statistics Office repeatedly lists low response rate, late responses and incomplete responses as main problems.

In what ways can producers, sources and users of statistics cooperate to produce statistics of greater — to again quote Dr. Oñate — "relevance and usefulness, accuracy, and reliability, timeliness and consistency"?

To produce statistics of greater "relevance and usefulness", producers and users should have a clear meeting of the minds on the uses to which the statistics are to be put. Particularly for the private sector — but often for the government as well — overly aggregated statistics have limited relevance and usefulness. Breakdowns by kinds — and often by areas — are usually necessary if statistics are to guide planning and programming. However, the users should keep in mind the cost constraints of producing excessively refined statistics — and, may I suggest insofar as the private sector is concerned that they should be prepared to pay for the production of statistics that are so product and/or area specific that the statistics equate with market research results? It may be appropriate to point out that as the ASEAN Economic Community begins to take more concrete shape, ASEAN-wide statistics, especially of the markets and productive capacities for major industrial products, has become more relevant and useful. (Relevant, reliable and timely statistics with readily relatable bases are quite difficult to come by.)

To produce statistics of greater "accuracy and reliability", producers, sources and users need to cooperate fully. The cooperation of non-user sources may sometimes be difficult to obtain and some form of suasion — in carrot to stick form depending on the circumstances — may be necessary. Ironically, even user sources are sometimes uncooperative in providing the information needed to produce data that they themselves want to use.

The government agencies who gather the data from private sector sources should take note, however, of private sector complaints that the latter are often asked to accomplish overlapping questionnaires by different government agencies. We understand that the recent creation of the NEDA Statistical Advisory Board is intended to do away with redundant surveys.

To produce statistics of greater "timeliness and consistency", producers obviously need more efficient data gathering and procession systems and procedures, and producers should be able to get sources to respond more promptly and more completely. For example, the 1977 NCSO Philippine Yearbook's "General Statistics for Manufacturing" tables contain statistics for up to 1974 only. As of April 17, 1978 — when my office inquired about more up-to-date figures — we were informed that data for 1975, 1976 and 1977 were not yet available. Quite plainly, the General Statistics for Manufacturing would have very limited value to both government and private sector users as bases for planning.

Having produced statistics of greater "relevance and usefulness, accuracy and reliability, timeliness and consistency" what are some of the ways that government and private sector can use the statistics?

In the setting of time-horized development goals, the government planners must obviously know where we stand and how we are progressing towards the goals set. And since plans, programs and projects need to be broken down into sectors and regions there is in addition the need to know where we stand on what, in what place and at what time.

The government also needs accurate and up-to-date data if its agencies are to be able to effectively exercise their control functions. For example, in determining whether certain industries are "over-crowded" and for determining proper "measured capacities."

For the private sector, accurate and up-to-date statistics provide the basis for planning expansion, for seeking rationalization — including hopefully, capacity-sharing arrangements (something the private sector needs to be nudged into by government), etc. The availability of statistics on the ASEAN Economic Community should enable the private sector of the ASEAN member countries to spearhead the putting together of ASEAN market-based industry-sharing packages. Dr. Bernardo M.

Villegas, Deputy Director of the Center for Research and Communication — together with Mr. A. Perez Avelino of the same organization — has described quite fully how the business sector tries to relate its corporate planning to economic indicators that are available to it.

Truly, as Conference Moderator Dr. Oñate has pointed out “A sound statistical system is a basic requirement for effective planning and development,” and I therefore second his hope that this Conference “will generate programs for the improvement of current development indicators. —”.