

TOWARDS A RATIONALIZED STATISTICAL SYSTEM

By

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It is not only coincidental but significant as well that Statistics Week should take place at the beginning of the new Administration. The proclamation of Statistics Week is among the first acts of President Magsaysay and this is because more than any one else, perhaps, our new Chief Executive realizes the deplorable lack of adequate information, of correct facts and figures on which to base our program for tomorrow.

This Administration is laying emphasis on the economic development of our rural areas from where 76.7 per cent of our population get their sustenance. Towards that end this Administration is sparing no efforts. But the Administration alone cannot achieve a miracle without the full support of the people, especially those who, by virtue of training and education, should be in the vanguard. The attainment of our goal requires the combined energies of us all.

Because of devastation caused by the last war and the fruitless years following, this Administration has fallen heir to a great number of problems. In the solution of these problems, correct diagnosis is essential; and correct diagnosis can only come if we have the correct tools and know how to use them properly.

I need not emphasize here the ever growing importance of the role of statistics in human life. You are yourselves familiar with this and with the development of statistics elsewhere and in this country. But it is pertinent to quote Miss Joy Wickens, retiring president of the American Statistical Association, who said:

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“Increasingly . . . statistics have been used to settle problems, and to determine courses of action. In private enterprise, quality control tests now change the production lines of industrial enterprises. New products are developed and tested by statistical means. Scientific experiments turn upon statistics. The management of industry today employs statistics in many ways as a guide to internal operations.”

In the Philippines, the observance of Statistics Week for the first time may be considered a reawakening to the scope, importance and significance of statistics. I used the word “re-awakening” for I understand the development of statistics here started as early as July 1, 1909, but apparently it has sunk to a stage of lethargy. But the state of chaos left by the war and our groping in the dark when we started reconstruction and rehabilitation work, sharpened our realization for the need for statistical services in the field of public administration. Now, people who understand the uses of statistics are no longer satisfied with slipshod methods and procedures in gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data. The confluence of both public and private demands upon our statistical offices and the statistical sophistication that has been growing locally combined forces to focus attention upon the deficiencies of our statistical system, necessitating a re-examination of our statistical world.

We are all by now familiar with the criticisms that have been levelled against our statistical system. The consensus of these criticisms reveal four facts:

1. That our financial outlay is inadequate to cope with the increased demand for efficient services;
2. That there is at present confusion in our statistical services;
3. That we lack professionally qualified statisticians; and
4. That our statisticians should be more progressive and more practical — they should not limit themselves to a mere recording of past events, but they should rather aim to look forward and endeavor to foresee the future.

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The Bureau of Census and Statistics is by law the central statistics agency of the country, but it has not been effective as such partly because it has failed to receive the financial support it badly needs, and partly because it has not been run with practical and progressive initiative. It has continued to operate on the 1941 budget of ₱114,419, which is only .02% of the national appropriation.

Because the Census office could not assume the responsibility of consolidating statistical authority in this country, the result has been a tendency to drift away from centralization toward decentralization, backtracking on the gains we had made with the passage of Commonwealth Act No. 591 creating the Census Bureau.

In view of our stringent financial condition, it may not be possible for us immediately to give the Census Bureau additional appropriation. There are many top priority projects that cannot even be started for lack of funds. But this does not mean that we shall merely fold our hands. The question is: Is it not possible to improve the existing practices without additional appropriations?

This poses a challenge to the industry and ingenuity of our men in the statistical field. Now more than ever, with the new administration determined to render service to the people even at a sacrifice, those engaged in the statistical work must cooperate unselfishly; for you, more than anyone else, realize that statistics could be the beginning of good government and a sound economic development.

And here we move on to the next problem: the confusion that exists in our statistical system. This confusion has been best illustrated by the conflicting figures on the production of rice.

How shall we do away with the confusion? I believe that it is necessary to create a body that could rationalize our statistical system by getting all the conflicting units to coordinate activities and cooperate with each other. A step along this direction has been made with the recommendation sponsored by your Association for the creation of the Statistical Advisory Board.

Pending the creation of the Statistical Advisory Board, I think that there should be closer liaison among the various of-

fices gathering figures and conducting statistical surveys to insure the maximum amount of cooperation, coordination and synchronization. We in the government service are not competing with each other; we are here for the same purpose — to serve the common good. It does not speak well of the service and of all of us who, while working on the same thing, cannot learn to cooperate with each other.

Again, pending the creation of the Statistical Advisory Board, I think that a division of statistical standards should be created similar to that of the Bureau of the Budget in the United States to: 1) review forms; 2) arrange for joint collection and use; 3) evolve uniform standards and 4) review budgetary request for statistical programs.

In the Philippines today there is an utter lack of uniformity of definitions, techniques, and procedures, making it difficult for one office to use the statistics gathered by another. Even in the publication of data we do not have uniformity. The adoption of uniform definitions, techniques, and procedures will make data collected by any agency comparable and consistent. It will avoid waste and duplications which are now rampant.

There is now an attempt to adopt uniform definitions, techniques, and procedures among members of the United Nations to make statistics comparable internationally. One of the resolutions approved in the United Nations Statistical Conference in Ottawa, Canada, and in New York, where we were represented, was the adoption of uniform definitions, techniques, and procedures for comparability. I notice with pleasant surprise that one of the latest issues of the *Central Bank Digest* carries a standardized operating procedure for sampling surveys. I hope that it will be adopted by all entities conducting sampling surveys.

This takes us to the third problem, namely the lack of qualified statistical personnel. Speaking of the lack of workers with the necessary statistical training, William I. Abraham, in his report, "The National Income of the Philippines", took occasion to state that —

"The basic obstacle to such progress in the Philippines is the acute shortage of persons with statistical

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training of even the most elementary kind. Statistical work is at present being done mainly by persons who have had no formal preparation for carrying out their responsibilities. As a result, haphazard collection, compilation and publication of statistics with hardly any regard to their quality or the purposes which are intended to serve are general throughout the government service."

I am happy to know that a Statistical Training Center will soon be established in the Philippines. This Center will go a long way towards solving the lack of qualified statisticians in this country.

Aside from the statistical training center, I feel that we should send as many pensionados abroad as we can afford to specialize in various aspects of statistics work. In this regard the Foreign Operations Administration should be commended in its effort to help improve the quality of our technicians.

If I might be permitted to make an observation, in connection with our fourth problem, the trouble with some of our statisticians is that they have fallen short of the full scope of the world and have become not statisticians but static. They live in the past with their dead figures; they have forgotten that figures are vibrant and alive and point to the future. As a matter of fact, the efforts to study the past is justified only because it helps forecast the future. In such matters as crop forecast, one should look to the statisticians to give us the correct expectation. The statisticians have many systems and methods to attain this objective with sufficient accuracy. To instill faith in the statistician's forecasts, periodic check-ups and reconciliations between the actual and the forecast figures should be publicized.

To the extent that the statisticians assist the general public in making correct expectations, the expenditure of public funds would be amply justified and it will be easier to obtain additional appropriation. And this, perhaps, is the root of our failures: Many of our statisticians need a revitalization of their outlook and perspective.

I have endeavored to have suggested some measures designed to rationalize our statistical services so that we might, with our limited resources, improve the quality of our work and the efficiency of the service in general. In the desire to improve the standards of our statistical services, I am heartened to know that the Philippine Statistical Association is at the vanguard.

We, in this country, are just beginning to feel the full impact of the importance and the use of statistics. It is but natural that in the initial stage there will be chaos and confusion. But let us not be dismayed by the problems that always attend the birth of a new science or a new idea. Rather, let us consider them as growing pains without which no growth may be achieved. Our part then—those of us engaged in statistics work—would be to keep doing to the best of our ability what we in conscience feel we should do, subordinating our personal interests to that of the common good, always striving for the uplift and betterment of the science and the profession which, we, individually and as a group, are committed to advance.

