

Response to professional competence and statistical integrity challenges faced in the Small Area Estimation (SAE): A public policy tool development perspective

Ramasamy Ramachandran

*Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM)*¹

1. Introduction

The Department of Statistics, Malaysia wishes to thank the editor of the Special Issue of the *Statistical Journal of the International Association of Official Statistics* for the opportunity to respond to the paper of Mr. Ramasamy Ramachandran. In this regard, the Department provides a general response to the issues raised by the writer.

2. Malaysia statistical system

The Malaysia statistical system is a centralised system whereby the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) is the national statistical agency under the Prime Minister's Department entrusted with the responsibility to collect, interpret and disseminate official statistics for the purpose of monitoring national economic performance and social development of the country. Nonetheless, other government agencies also undertake data collection to meet their specific needs and requirements.

¹Corresponding author, Nan Hasnani Long Padang. E-mail: nan.hasnani@stats.gov.my.

3. Data collection

DOSM celebrated its 60 years of establishment in 2009 and has come a long way from the collection of trade and agriculture (rubber estates) statistics to more comprehensive statistics which encompass all economic activities and a host of social and demographic data.

In realizing the Vision, Mission and Objectives of DOSM, initiatives and work ethics are based on best practices. In 1988, the Statistics Steering Committee chaired by the Chief Secretary to the Government was set up to determine guidelines and policies for national statistical activities. Meanwhile, the Main User Committee of which the Director General of the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) is the Chair was established to identify and define statistical priorities and requirements in line with national planning needs.

Through this mechanism, DOSM is able to fulfill the nation's needs in generating data of high quality and integrity as well as meeting international standards within the allocated resources and funds. DOSM adheres to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics of the United Nations Statistics Commission. The Code of Ethics for the statistical service was also drawn up to inculcate a culture of professionalism and integrity in DOSM.

DOSM operates under the Statistics Act 1965 (Rev. 1989). Section 2 (2) stipulates that "to collect and inter-

pret statistics for the purpose of furnishing information required in the formation or carrying out government policy in any field or otherwise required for government purposes or meeting the needs of trade, commerce, industry or agriculture”, while Section 2 (3) states “. . . the Department shall, where they consider it in the public interest, have power to communicate statistics collected by them or their interpretation of statistics . . .”.

4. Engagement with users

DOSM always maintains its relevance to the needs of the users. Hence, DOSM engages in consultations with the relevant government agencies as well as private businesses/associations through dialogues, seminars, interactive sessions, working visits, etc. Certain data are collected for the use of the Government while others are available for public consumption. The Household Income Survey/Household Basic Amenities Survey (HBAS) is conducted by DOSM for EPU. Thus, EPU is the custodian of the data.

5. ICT data

Data with regards to ICT usage by households can be obtained from the Population and Housing Census as well as Household Income Survey/Household Basic Amenities Survey. The data sourced from the household sector is further strengthened by which DOSM is currently designing an instrument towards the collection on a regular basis.

Data on ICT statistics on businesses have been collected since 2001 for reference year 2000 while statistics on use by businesses and the usage of ICT in the operations of businesses have been developed since 2008 (reference year 2007).

6. Communication of statistics

As per Section 2(3) mentioned above, the Chief

Statistician is the authority to release data and findings of the surveys/censuses/compilation of data undertaken by DOSM. Frequency of such releases is on a monthly, quarterly, half-yearly and annual basis. In fact, release dates of data on national accounts, labour force, Consumer Price Index, Index of Industrial Production are ahead of the standards set by the International Monetary Fund. Accessibility of data is increasingly made available through DOSM’s website and free downloads.

7. Conclusion

The writer is not being fair in criticising DOSM. As a government agency, it has to adhere to rules and regulations as well as be accountable to its stakeholders. The Strategic Plan of DOSM for the period 2010–2014 which is the fifth of its series has been approved by the Government. This Plan takes into consideration the requirements of main stakeholders and other users.

In providing statistical services to its users, DOSM is acknowledged by many institutions and individuals. Recently, Radzuan Halim, writing in *The Edge Malaysia* [1] commented, “we in Malaysia have been known to keep good economic statistics from way back. Credit can be accorded to our statisticians in the government services, particularly in the Statistics Department. Political leaders must continue to respect the integrity and professionalism of our statisticians and not allow spin-doctoring, much less outright cheating, to get in the way.”

Reference

- [1] Radzuan Halim, “Learning from a Greek Tragedy,” *The Edge Malaysia*, 10 May 2010, p. 62, The Edge Communications Sdn. Bhd, 2010.