



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**18th National Statistics Month,
10th National Convention on Statistics,
International Conference on Millennium Development Goals Statistics**

**Organized by the Philippines National Statistical Coordination Board;
in collaboration with the Philippine Statistical System, the Asian Development Bank,
and the United Nations.**

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Keynotes Address

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The Honourable Governor Joey Salceda
The Honourable Secretary of Socio-Economic Planning, Mr Augusto Santos
Secretary General, National Statistical Coordination Board, Dr Virola
Representatives of Asian Development Bank,
Representatives of the UN family,
Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the United Nations, I would like to congratulate the National Statistical Coordination Board for organizing this International Conference on the Millennium Development Goals Statistics, in conjunction with the celebration of two important national events: the 18th National Statistical Month and the 10th National Convention on Statistics. The United Nations, comprising the office of the UN Resident Coordinator in the Philippines, the Economic and Social Commission of the Asia and the Pacific, ILO, UNDP and the UN Statistics Division, is pleased to be a partner in this very important event.

The two national events are reflective of the recognition that official statistics play a very central role in the Philippine society and much attention is given in advocating and promoting official statistics. Celebrating the Statistics Month is particularly important in promoting the awareness and appreciation of the importance and value of official statistics in different sectors of society. I truly believe that the various activities that you'll organize this month will greatly reinforce the high level of cooperation and support from the general public thus contributing to the production of higher quality statistics in the country.

The United Nations Statistics Division has been following the evolution of the Philippines Statistical System (PSS) over the years. Your statistical system has a long history and tradition in the production of sound statistics to inform policy makers and other stakeholders. Under the leadership of Dr Virola, the PSS has been able to evolve along with new circumstances and demands over the decades. I understand that through a series of reforms, it has re-engineered its way of “doing business” to address the

emerging statistical requirements for both national and international programmes, maintaining high standards in the production of relevant official statistics.

I understand that recently, a Scientific Career System for Statisticians was approved by NSCB Executive Board in August 2006 for the purpose of promoting statistics as a profession in the country. I trust this initiative will result in better career paths for statisticians and will increase their visibility and ranking in civil servants positions. I congratulate the Philippines Statistical System for their ability to keep improving their data collection systems despite changing financial conditions and budgetary cuts and for exploring cost-effective alternative methods of producing statistics by making a better use of administrative data. I am confident that by keeping advocating on the importance of reliable statistics with expert stakeholders as well as the general public, increased and more sustainable investments in statistics will follow. Thanks to the latest Statistical Development Programme (PSDP 2005-2010), you now have a clear blueprint to ensure coordination of statistical activities in the country and a road map to guarantee successful monitoring of MDGs indicators.

Attributes of an Effective Statistical Systems

As you know very well, an effective statistical system plays an influential role in the evolution of the society and the economy, as it provides the knowledge base of past trends and future trajectories. This influence goes beyond the number of books and publications; instead, it is a reflection of an evidence-based decision making environment and the level of rationality in the society. An effective system therefore is an important national institution, vital for the progress of a country.

If we look at the effective statistical systems around the world, we could derive some common attributes, or contributing factors. I will briefly discuss six of them.

1. An evidence-based policy making environment with reliance on quantitative indicators.

An evidence-based policy making environment provides a necessary condition, an enabling context for a strong statistical system producing quantitative indicators to emerge. A weak government, or a regime with no interest in quantitative evidence, for example, would not be able to provide the context for a functioning statistical system. Conversely, a strong government with a long history of reliance on statistics would give rise to a very strong statistical system.

2. Professional independence and objectivity, anchored on high credibility and strong reputation.

An effective national statistical system must earn the professional respect among the users and the public. This respect builds on the recognition of professional reputation and objectivity. This in turn gives rise to the credibility and trustworthiness of the statistical system. The 'professional' reputation could be easily tarnished if objectivity is compromised by political agenda or interference. Hence, it is generally recognised that professionalism and professional independence are by far the most important elements in an effective national statistical system. In some countries, professional independence and objectivity is enshrined by legal provisions. This leads me to the third attribute:

3. Presence of legal framework providing authority and powers to the statistical agency

There is the need for a clear legislation that sets out the authority and powers of a statistical agency and its role in the overall system, including the position in the national administration. The law should specify the coordination mechanism among the various parts of the system, especially in sharing of data sources and building up common infrastructure. The law should also spell out the responsibility and obligations, such as publishing the results of collections and ensuring confidentiality of information collected from respondents. Looking around the world, most of countries can count on the presence of a statistical law providing the authority and rules under which the national statistical office operates.

4. Professional leadership to lead, coordinate and set highest scientific standards for the statistical system

An effective statistical system requires a top-notch professional to be at the helm of the system. The position of Chief Statistician who provides the professional leadership is a critical success factor. The authority of the Chief Statistician derives from several factors besides the formal legal mandate. A major source is the level of the position within the government hierarchy. Most importantly, the authority of the Chief Statistician derives from his or her personal standing and public image. These are enhanced by being the main person to explain major public issues through statistical analysis and to protect against the politicization of the statistical system.

5. Enhanced information technology and human resource infrastructure

Professional leadership of the top management aside, an effective system also requires a dedicated group of professional staff. What we have seen is that recruitment and retention of professional expertise is another key success factor for a statistical system to excel itself. In systems that have high staff turnover, the depletion of expertise often leads to shoddy work and a lack of willingness to improve.

Much of the statistical work now requires the support of a certain level of information technology. Over the years, the advancement of IT and its differential adoption and utilization has resulted in a clear divergence in national statistical system as far as efficiency is concerned. Those systems that have been able to adopt and exploit IT have been able to develop their system to a high level of technological sophistication. Because of this technology platform, they are able to perform far more complex statistical operations than less equipped systems.

6. Responsiveness to changing user groups and their evolving needs

The ultimate test of the statistical system must be its ability to satisfy the needs of its clients. The NSO basic product lines should evolve in response to the changing needs of society and should meet the particular dissemination requirements of different client groups. Users of official statistics have multiplied over the years. Official statistics are traditionally supplied to ministries of industry and finance; to planning commissions and to ministries of trade; and to the ministries of agriculture, transportation and labour.

Today the users have expanded to include departments that look after the natural

environment, housing, welfare, education, health, justice and energy. In addition, official statistics are now used by large businesses and the general public on a scale not unlike that of the government. The ability to map out the changing preferences of the users, to develop an operating system to meet these needs, and to promote free and accessible data systems is a hallmark of an effective statistical system.

MDG as a Framework for Measuring and Making Progress

In the past decade, national statistical systems are increasingly being asked to produce development indicators that would guide national and global policy discussions. This brings us to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) indicators.

The understanding of global development and progress, and the measurement of these concepts, has been a central concern of the UN system since its inception in 1946. The UN Functional Commissions, Fund and Programmes have each devoted significant time and efforts to understand the dimensions of progress in specific areas which range from status of women to sustainable development, from population growth to financing for development. In the 1990s, a series of World Conferences were held giving the world a clear development agenda focusing on wide ranging areas.

The culmination of all these discussions on development and progress is of course the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and a set of development goals and targets. Since they were first adopted in 2000 by all member states of the United Nations, the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals have become a truly shared framework for development. The Goals are now broadly understood as a universal framework for development and a means for developing countries and their development partners to work together in pursuit of a better life for the common people.

Progress in meeting the targets is measured on the basis of a list of internationally agreed indicators. Over the years, the MDG indicators have become widely accepted and used in national, regional and international programmes for monitoring and evaluating the

implementation of the MDGs and are now recognized as a truly common monitoring framework used consistently by all development partners. The whole UN system and partner agencies have made the measurement of indicators as against the targets one of its main priorities.

Since 2005, we have been releasing a dedicated annual report on the progress towards achieving the MDGs. The 2007 progress report on MDGs has been launched the past July by the Secretary-General. Copies of the report are here available for all participants. It presents the most comprehensive global assessment of progress to date, based on a set of data prepared by a large number of international organizations within and outside the United Nations system.

Thanks to the MDGs, the importance of building stronger statistical systems to produce better statistics has assumed a critical role in the development agenda. It is now fully and widely recognized that a lot more needs to be done if adequate data are to be available for national and international evidence-based monitoring and reviews of progress towards all development goals and for designing and implementing the policies and programmes needed to achieve them.

At the country level, thanks to the reporting mechanism set up to monitor the MDGs, there is a greater awareness of the deficiency in the capacity of the national statistical system. The UN Statistical Commission has discussed this issue at length. In 2006, a resolution was adopted to urge greater attention in this matter. The World Bank is now managing the Marrakech Action Plan which helps promote the need for action to raise statistical capacity. In this regard, Paris21 is bringing development partners together with countries to promote the development of national strategies in building national statistical systems.

There is also greater sensitivity now on what are nationally produced statistical estimates, as compared with those imputed by the international agencies. The countries are no

longer prepared to passively accept the figures pumped out routinely by the international agencies. There is a sense of national ownership of the information on MDG progress. The MDG indicators deal with facts, not perceptions. This fits the mission and mandate of the national statistical system. The incorporation of the measurement of MDG indicators as official statistics would help enhance the position of the national statistical system, which is to objectively assess the various elements of the society and to measure their change. MDGs indicators plus other official statistics help country to do just that; measure progress, and making progress.

Concluding Remarks

There is no doubt that more pressure will be put on national statistical systems to respond to the need for development indicators. In the seven years to come before the MDGs target date of 2015, we can expect an increased demand for availability of good statistics and for strengthened statistical systems able to systematically/regularly measure, monitor and report on progress towards the achievement of MDGs. There will be increasing national requirements as well as demand for improved and better coverage of the indicators. By looking at the way the Philippines Statistical System is fast evolving, I feel confident in saying that the PSS is ready for the challenge and will be able to face increased requests to produce the necessary data to assess results.

I wish you all a fruitful discussion and look forward to the outcome and recommendations of the first International Conference on MDG Statistics.