

United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific

Seventh Management Seminar
for the Heads of National Statistical Offices in Asia and the Pacific
13 - 15 October 2008, Shanghai, China

Managing Issues addressing the Challenges of Using Administrative Data for Statistical Purposes

Country Paper: **Statistics Department, TONGA**

Brief Introduction:

Statistics in Tonga became a department in July 1975 under the Minister of Finance, and the Statistics Act was passed by the Legislative Assembly in 1978. The last major project of the Statistics was the Population Census 2006 (Census date, 30 November 2006, then processed during 2007, published 2008 with a total population of 101,991 people only). Its recent annual budget is about T\$0.6million and the current one is closed to T\$1.0m (included the proposed HIES 2008/09 fund). Statistics lost its 6 staff members in voluntary redundancy in July 2006 and currently has 28 staff members with 2 vacancies.

1) Main uses of administrative data for statistical purpose:

There are 3 ways of accessing to the administrative data for statistical purposes;

- (i) Statistics staff access to admin record and extract the required information,
- (ii) Statistics receive copies of admin data, like approved annual reports, and
- (iii) Statistics sent questionnaire (survey) to the concerned agencies to fill in with the required information.

These admin data are required for statistical purposes only. Such that, for statistical outputs, we used various admin data, like custom entries (foreign trade statistics), tax returns (national accounts), register of births and deaths (vital statistics), etc. And for sampling purposes, it depends on the survey purposes. For a household survey, the sampling frame is available within the department from the previous Population Census. However, for a business survey, the business register is the most appropriate one. Thus, this register is an admin data of other ministry.

2) Main management issues from using administrative data for statistical purposes, e.g.

- (a) Do concepts and definitions not conform to international standards?*
- (b) Are incomplete or inaccurate records a serious problem?*
- (c) Can the data be disaggregated to provide data for regions and other?
sub-populations?*

The using of administrative data is well managed under the Statistical Act, however, the refusal cannot be avoided. The said Act stated the punishment (through Court) against

those who refused to provide the requested data to the Statistics. The same punishment to the Statistics staff members who breach the Act. However, for just 30 year old Stat Act, the department never sent to Court anyone who breached this Act, particularly the Refusals. In this case, the department considered the court case, resources and future relations with users and data sources, thus take other alternatives rather than court case.

* *International standard*: The concepts and definitions of admin data we collected is well align with the international standard, despite a minor deficiency. But the department was able to resolve in a professional manner. Such that, to understand the deficient admin data and see why different from the international standard, then translate/transform one to the other.

* *Incomplete & Inaccurate records*: These 2 problems often arising depend on what admin data. No way out but to call back in a friendly and professional manner. When call back was not working, we look to previous record, then make some imputation.

* *Disaggregation*: No doubt, most of the admin data can be disaggregated, but depends on users' demand and staff resources.

3) *Manage the quality of statistics derived from administrative data effectively and efficiently? eg. (a) How do you evaluate the quality of statistics from administrative data used for statistical purposes in the NSO? (b) Are there any cross checks available from survey data?*

* The admin data received are first edited by concerned staff members of each admin data. They looked for completeness, accuracy, classification, etc. If any of these fail, a high level communications to the source data for assistance.

* At present, no survey data available in the Department to cross-check the admin data, except the last National Population Census 2006, which followed by a Post Enumeration Survey (PES) to assess the quality of this Census data. However, there are 2 admin records (for vital statistics) that are used one to cross check the other.

4) *Manage the relationship with the administrative departments collecting data used in compiling important indicators and other statistics? eg. (a) What training is already available in your country for line ministry personnel? (b) Is the available training well suited to ensure the quality of statistics generated? (c) Do you have formal agreements with the administrative department?*

At first, a friendly consultation with top people of the administrative departments and well inform them of the importance of their data for statistical purposes and for the national developments. There has not been a training to target for using the admin record, but importance of admin record were explaining in other stats trainings where attended by participants outside the Statistics. Some admin departments have made formal agreements to supply admin record to Statistics, some have responded on request and some delayed or never respond.

5) *What are major obstacles/ weaknesses faced in your country on the use of administrative data for statistical purposes?*

Some admin departments are highly cooperative to the department, however, there have been some obstacles that faced with the receiving/using of admin data for statistical purposes, such that;

- Few admin departments need to exchange their admin data with some stat data (individual) they needed. This is very serious, such that, they need stat data for administrative purposes, while it is not allowed by the Statistics Act. That is, the data (like census or surveys) received by Statistics for statistics purposes only.
- Non-cooperation. Some admin departments are main users of the statistics outputs are not cooperated in providing their admin data for statistics purposes.
- No proper records due to staff turn-over.
- Delaying of approvals, from auditing, boards, AGM, or LA (of Ministries/Departments/Public Enterprises)

Conclusion:

In this 7MS, it is expected to share with experiences of other NSOs and learn how to resolve each current problem/s and find ways for future improvements.
