

**Seminar on Innovations in Official Statistics**  
**United Nations Statistics Division, New York**  
**20 February 2009**

**Innovation in Data Dissemination**

**1. Introduction**

**1.1 Background**

The Department of Statistics Malaysia was established in 1949 under the Statistics Ordinance 1949 and was then known as Bureau of Statistics. The statistics produced then was limited to external trade and estate agriculture.

In 1965, the name of Bureau of Statistics was changed to the Department of Statistics, Malaysia and was operating under the provisions of Statistics Act 1965. The Department's functions and role had expanded whereby the data/information collected included the economy and social areas.

The Department of Statistics Malaysia is a premier government agency under the Prime Minister Office entrusted with the responsibility to collect, interpret and disseminate latest and real time statistics in the monitoring of national economic performance and social development.

**1.2 Role**

The Department strives to increase and broaden its role as the premier agency in the field of statistics towards establishing a quality, user-oriented and timely information system for the formulation of policies for national development planning and administration.

**1.3 Function of the Department**

Under the "Statistics Act 1965 (Revised 1989)", the main functions of the department are:

- To collect and interpret statistics for the purpose of formulation or implementation of government policies in whatever fields as needed by the government or for fulfilling the requirements of trade, commerce, industry, agriculture or others
- To disseminate statistics which have been collected or interpretation based on statistics collected, not only to government agencies but also to authorities or persons where the information is useful to them

## **2. Customers of the Department of Statistics**

Customers of the Department are made up of those from Malaysia and from abroad. Local customers are mainly our policy makers, other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private companies, students and the general public. On the other hand, our customers from abroad include international organizations such as World Health Organization (WHO), International Labour Organization (ILO), World Bank as well as business community and researchers.

## **3. Data dissemination**

Statistical data produced by the Department are disseminated monthly, quarterly, half yearly and annually in two languages (Malay and English). They are disseminated in different media to reach different set of users.

### **3.1 Publications**

Findings from surveys/censuses are published in printed form and are distributed free of charge to main users of the Department and are also available for sale to interested parties. Other than in printed form, some of the publications are available in the form of cd-roms. Publications for direct sale are available at the Users' Service Unit of the Department. Instead of paying a visit to the Users' Service Unit, users can place their orders through letters and through facsimile. Beginning year 2000, orders can be made via e-mail and online order form. For all publications mailed to customers, postage will be added to the amount charged.

### **3.2 Counter Service**

Service counters were set up in headquarters and state offices to serve as points of sales and to assist customers with their purchase of publications and data requests. Occasionally when a certain publication is out of stock, photocopies are made with a standard charge of RM0.50 a page.

Prior to setting up these service counters, customers were only able to make references to the various publications.

### **3.3 Data Requests**

In the event where customers find that the data presented in the publications do not meet their requirements, they are free to make requests according to their specifications. These requests for information would be ascertained for availability and confidentiality. If a particular information is not available, the customer would be directed to other agencies likely having the required information. When a customer requests for information at micro level, then the information would not be released because it is classified as confidential. For information which can be produced for use by the public, the customers would be informed of the charges payable and they must agree with the amount before the data could be released.

### **3.4 Website**

The Department constructed its website in late 1998 and since then internet users can visit the website for various information. Users can browse through products and services offered by the Department such as key statistics, latest statistical releases, publications available in the Department, services offered, surveys and censuses, journals and database. Users can place their purchase orders for selected publications by using online order form. Key statistics and some of the publications can be downloaded free of charge. In the near future, more publications could be downloaded at no cost. This information is updated periodically as soon as new releases are available. Where

information is not available online, users are free to request for information through e-mail.

Glossary on statistical terms, metadata and questionnaires used in surveys and censuses are also available on our website. These information will assist users to understand our statistics better. Advance release calendar is also posted on the website so users can be aware of our dates of next releases.

We also offer e-services where users can link themselves to our library, fill up order form for publications and requests for data. Feedback form is also available for users to forward their complaints/comments on our website and information presented.

For easy access, our website is linked to various organizations, local and international, national statistical offices worldwide and other government agencies in Malaysia. Two notable links for latest statistical information are NSDP and BLIS.

#### **3.4.1 NSDP**

Malaysia is one of the many countries subscribing to Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) established by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The National Summary Data Page (NSDP) for Malaysia provides comprehensive economic and financial data. Department of Statistics contributes to the sections on real sector, external sector and population. Other contributors are the Central Bank of Malaysia, the Treasury and Bursa Malaysia.

#### **3.4.2 BLIS**

Department of Statistics is linked to BERNAMA (Malaysian National News Agency) website by providing online data from seven areas. This service is known as BERNAMA Library Infolink Services (BLIS) and users need to subscribe to this facility to be able to access the online data. Data sent to be uploaded to BLIS are:

- Consumer Price Index

- Index of Industrial Production
- Monthly Manufacturing Statistics
- Trade Summary
- Economic Indicators
- Malaysian Economy in Brief
- Monthly Statistical Bulletin

Apart from using links to other websites, users can make use of Really Simple Syndication (RSS) service provided to keep informed of the latest releases and information.

All the information posted on the website can be accessed not only by normal sighted persons, the website is also user-friendly to other not so fortunate people. Colour blind persons can select the colours they are comfortable with and those who have problems reading the screen can enlarge the font size to their preference.

### **3.5 Exhibitions**

In our efforts to promote and market our products and services as well as reaching out to potential customers, we regularly take part in exhibitions organized by universities and government agencies. Our products were put on display for the public to browse through where this would create awareness on what type of information we have to offer.

### **3.6 mySMS**

The Department is working on using short messaging service (sms) as another means to further enhance data dissemination. Users can obtain key statistics anytime and anywhere and as a start statistics on six areas would be available viz. population, gross domestic product, consumer price index, external trade, monthly manufacturing and unemployment rate. Registered subscribers to our releases would be notified as and when these releases are ready. Other than statistics, users can also request for documents and lodge complaints and

comments. The Department can also use this service to broadcast upcoming event such as the next population and housing census.

### **3.7 Online Database**

The Department currently maintains two databases containing information on small and medium scale enterprises known as National SME database and information on agriculture called Agriculture Database System. These databases are only accessible by several government agencies. However, interested parties could request for data extracted from these databases and reasonable fee would be imposed.

At present, the Department is working on a project to enhance the capability of the current information technology system. This project aims at regulating, integrating and improve the system/applications to support the operations of the Department. It will create a sophisticated system where statistical data from all subject matter divisions and state offices will be processed in a short time.

Eventually, by year 2010, the Department will maintain the database of all industries covered by all surveys and censuses conducted by the Department. Data retrieval will be centralized as opposed to the present system where data requests will be channeled to the respective subject matter divisions. In the process of data retrieval from database, the Department will take precautions so that no individual identification will be revealed.

### **3.8 Electronic Payment**

Currently, the Department is working on e-payment facility which would make monetary transactions easier for our customers especially for those from abroad. Customers can pick their mode of payment ranging from cash, postal/money order, bank drafts or using the computer to transfer the money. For the e-payment, customers can either use their credit cards or make direct debit from their accounts. However, direct debiting is not extended to customers from abroad.

#### **4. Summary**

In line with its mission to increase and broaden its role as the premier agency in the field of statistics, the Department of Statistics has come a long way from disseminating data through printed publications to using information technology and communication to keep up with the times. From handing out publications through mail and at point of sale, we have expanded our means of disseminating data through our website and at the same time we have linkages to other websites, local and international. Requests for publications and data are entertained not just through normal mail and faxes, now we are doing it via e-mails and online order form. Very soon, mobile phones will be a useful tool to obtain latest key statistics and to be reminded of the latest releases from our Department. Later on, our customers will be paying their dues not only by using bankdrafts, money order, postal order and cash, they will be able to do so the e-payment way.

Department of Statistics, Malaysia

December 2008