

MEETING THE STATISTICAL TRAINING NEEDS OF THE PHILIPPINE STATISTICAL SYSTEM: EXPERIENCE OF THE PHILIPPINE STATISTICAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING INSTITUTE¹

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This paper examines how the Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute (PSRTI), in the performance of its mandated mission, responds to the demands for upgrading the capability of statistical manpower in the Philippines. Current strategies for effective and efficient delivery of training services to local and foreign clientele that have proven to be effective in spite of the limited resources are discussed. Plans of the newly-organized PSRTI are only partly laid out pending the finalization of its transition process from the Statistical Research and Training Center.

I. BACKGROUND

1. The PSRTI as the Research and Training Arm of the Philippine Statistical System (PSS)

The Statistical Research and Training Center (SRTC) was created in 1987 as the research and training arm of the Philippine Statistical System (PSS). However, the enactment of Republic Act No. 10625, otherwise known as the Philippine Statistical Act of 2013, abolished the SRTC and established the Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute (PSRTI). The same law also merged four major statistical agencies engaged in primary data collection and compilation of secondary data, namely the National Statistical Coordination Board; Bureau of Agricultural Statistics; National Statistics Office; and the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics into the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The PSS consists of statistical organizations at all administrative levels, the personnel therein and the national statistical program. The PSS, in spite of the merging of the four major statistical agencies remains decentralized with a strong coordination feature to be achieved through postings of trained personnel and closer linkage between statistical programming and budgeting.

The PSRTI is tasked to carry out the following functions: (a) develop a comprehensive and integrated research and training program on theories, concepts and methodologies for the promotion of the statistical system; (b) undertake research on statistical concepts, definitions and methods; (c) promote collaborative efforts among members of the academic community, data producers and users; (d) conduct non-degree training programs to upgrade the quality of statistical personnel and expand statistical manpower base in support of the needs of the PSS; (e) provide scholarships, financial and other forms of assistance to build statistical manpower and enhance training and statistical research and development; (f) serve as repository of all statistical researches and studies to be generated by the PSA as well as back-up/duplicate files of data archives and other statistical databases of the PSS; and (g) invest its funds in such undertaking as it may deem wise or necessary to carry out its objectives with due consideration to existing guidelines on investing government funds.

2. PSRTI Mission

The overall mission of the PSRTI (still based on the SRTC mission as the transition process into the PSRTI is on-going) is the improvement of the quality of statistical information

¹ This document benefitted from related papers by Gervacio G. Selda, Jr. (former Executive Director); Mary Ann Magtulis (Statistician V) and Jesusa Pe Benito (Statistician IV), PSRTI.

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generated by the PSS through conduct of high quality, objective and responsive statistical research and training activities. Through these activities, the PSRTI helps ensure that the country's statistical system generates quality, timely and relevant information for use in development planning, policy formulation and in general, decision making in the government.

3. Resources of the PSRTI

Presently, the PSRTI has 24 professional staff. However, the new organizational structure is now being prepared and the staff complement is envisioned to be almost double the existing set-up. PSRTI financial resources come from the (a) yearly appropriation from the government; (b) income from endowment fund; and (c) training fees and research projects.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATISTICAL TRAINING PROGRAM

The initial list of training courses in 1988 to 1995 was determined in coordination with the former National Statistical Coordination Board as the highest policy-making body for statistical matters. These were later updated based on a survey sometime in 1995, and which could be considered as a training needs assessment of the PSS. A major document also referred to was the Philippine Statistical Development Programs which cites the statistical activities to be undertaken and from which the PSRTI then determines training topics to be undertaken. Other topics were either included or dropped based on client-demand, needs of national and local development planning, and developments in the field of statistics. However, the PSRTI plans to develop a 6-year training agenda to provide more focus to its training programs.

The PSRTI training programs consist of regular and customized training courses. Topics under the 2014 regular trainings include basic statistics; basic computer operation and internet essentials for compiling statistics; statistical report writing; understanding official statistics; basic statistics for research; data management with MS Excel; decision-making with data; database management using MS Access; statistical analysis with STATA; statistical forecasting and missing data estimation; effective use of MS Excel and Power Point for statistical reports; administration of surveys and focus group discussion with qualitative data analysis; regression analysis; statistics for policy analysis; basic webpage development for information dissemination; cost-benefit analysis of projects using STATA; questionnaire design; sampling methods with statistical analysis using STATA; effective statistical presentation skills; and development of an interactive webpage for statistical reports.

The curricula and materials of the courses are developed and updated regularly by the PSRTI training staff and the resource persons. The training programs are listed in the calendar of courses available in hard copy and electronic format through the PSRTI website (www.srtrc.gov.ph). Statistical course offerings are updated every year based on feedback received from participants as well as consultations with statistical agencies and stakeholders.

In addition to its regular course offerings, the PSRTI conducts specialized or customized training programs covering any topic on statistics for local and international clients. Such programs may range in duration from five days to two months. The contents of these trainings are individually designed in consultation with the clients and resource persons to ensure that specific training needs are satisfied. The cost of each customized program depends largely on developing the training program including materials, program duration, food arrangements and other administrative expenses.

Most of the trainings conducted for foreign statisticians are classified as customized or specialized trainings. These are implemented with the assistance and/or support of UN agencies, international institutions, or funding from the national governments of the client country. The PSRTI provides counterpart support through its training facilities, providing the resource persons for the trainings, supplying the needed administrative support to carry out the training, and

shouldering certain incidental expenses. Foreign-assisted trainings were mostly for the system of national accounts and econometric modeling.

III. STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE STATISTICAL TRAINING PROGRAM

Among the many challenges faced by the PSRTI in implementing and reaching out to more participants in its non-degree training program; are (a) small manpower complement of its Training Division; (b) office being located in the capital region only; (c) absence of in-house experts as training resource persons; (d) limited financial resources to conduct subsidized training for local government units; and (e) need to adopt modern technology in the conduct of training courses.

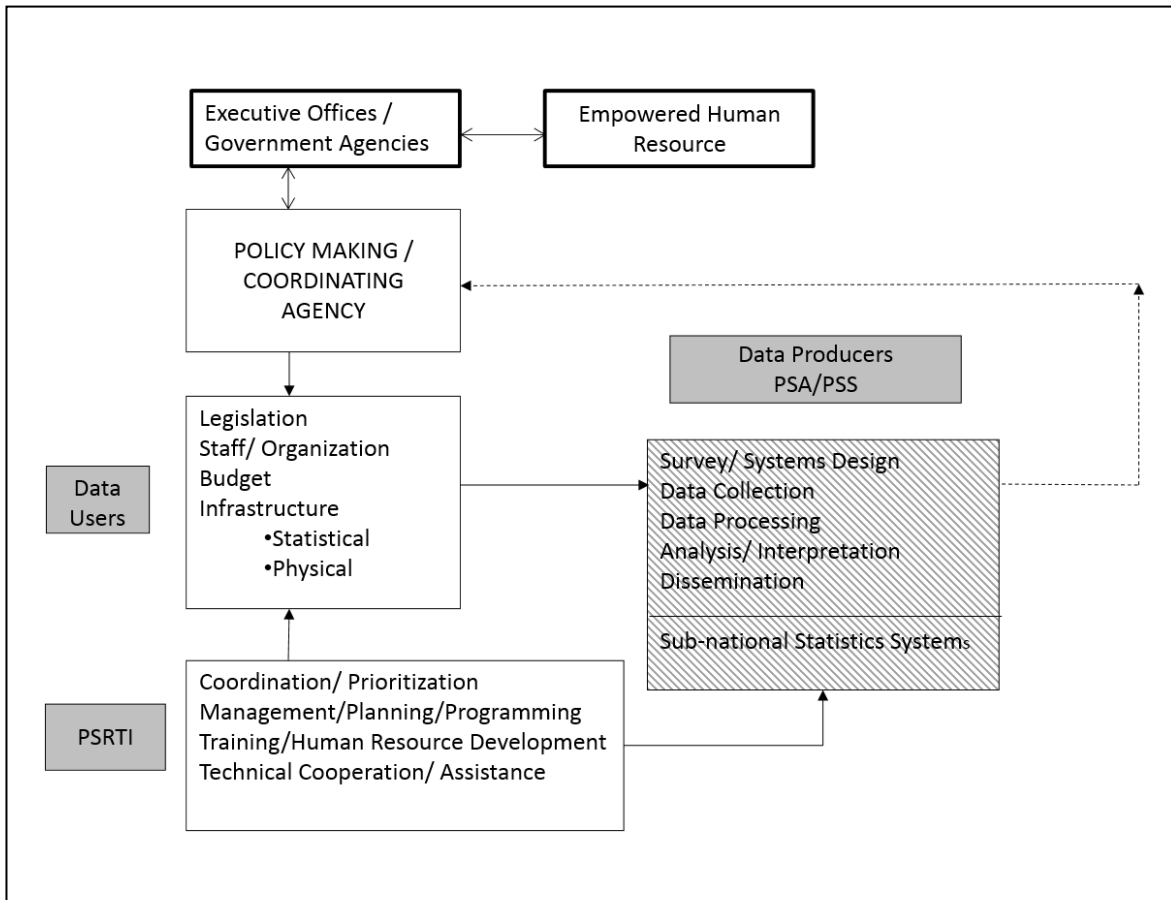
The PSRTI has adopted several strategies to address these problems. One is the establishment of strong linkages with premier academic institutions in statistics, major statistical agencies, other government agencies, and international agencies operating in the country in providing resource persons. Another approach more applicable to local trainings is building partnerships with higher education institutions, such as local universities and colleges operating in the regions outside the national capital region where the PSRTI is located. Ideally, the PSRTI staff should serve as resource persons but are unable to do so due to the work involved in coordinating the training programs. To ensure the viability of this arrangement, the PSRTI undertook the following: (a) training the point person in each training affiliate on proper coordination and management of a training program; (b) making an inventory of potential resource persons in the area; (c) inventory of training and other related materials available at the PSRTI that can be used in local trainings; and (d) conduct of training programs for potential resource persons of future training courses. As of January 2010, the PSRTI has 47 local universities and colleges as training affiliates. In 2008 and 2009, there were 23 and 5 new member-colleges/universities, respectively. This approach enables the PSRTI to make its presence felt more in areas outside Metro Manila and reach a larger clientele, while affiliate institutions see this arrangement as an opportunity to generate additional income, be more relevant to the local area and serves as a vehicle in launching programs of strengthening research capability, especially its statistical side.

Partnerships have also been forged with UN agencies such as the UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, and Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP), as well as aid-giving international institutions like World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Japan International Cooperation Agency. About 31 countries from the region have benefited from these partnerships.

The PSRTI website <http://www.srtc.gov.ph> is a major marketing tool for its training services. Moreover, the feedback of satisfied clients is one of the best marketing tools. The PSRTI will also take advantage of social media in marketing its training services.

A new approach to be implemented when the PSRTI becomes fully operational is to develop a six-year training agenda that will address the needs of the newly-organized PSA to enable it to provide the statistical data support for the Philippine Development Plan. The training agenda will then be the basis for the training courses to be conducted by the PSRTI. The diagram below is **draft** framework for statistical capacity building for discussion in the transition process from the SRTC to the PSRTI.

Draft Framework for Statistical Capacity Building, PSRTI



To also address the issue of the availability of resource persons for the training courses, plans under the PSRTI include the hiring of training fellows as fulltime staff; and the development of training manuals to standardize the coverage of training topics.

Other matters related to the development of statistical manpower in the Philippines include the implementation of a certification system for statistics personnel/certification of basic statistics competence which could use the core skills framework (CSF) as a guide. The PSRTI also plans to pursue a scientific career system for statisticians.

IV. STATISTICAL CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVES SINCE 1987

Being the training arm of the PSS, the PSRTI conducts statistical training programs regularly for the PSS workforce to equip them with the knowledge and skills in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating statistical information for public consumption.

The table below shows that the PSRTI has conducted 912 training programs from 1988 to 1st quarter of 2013 that benefitted 19,332 participants from the national line agencies, local government offices, private sector and foreign entities. With a small training staff, the PSRTI has been able to increase the number of training programs for the past 24 years.

Number of Training Courses and Participants Conducted by the PSRTI: 1988-2013

Year	No. of Training Courses				No. of Participants			
	Total	Regular	Customized		Total	Regular	Customized	
			Local	Int'l			Local	Int'l
1988	8*				137*			
1989	20*				425*			
1990	28*				738*			
1991	30				681*			
1992	24	7	17		567	158	409	
1993	22	5	17		640	101	539	
1994	18	13	5		294	181	113	
1995	29	4	24	1	670	66	566	38
1996	22	5	17		465	95	370	
1997	34	14	20		675	253	422	
1998	26	13	13		487	200	287	
1999	36	21	15		813	377	436	
2000	31	24	7		550	398	152	
2001	32	14	18		568	236	332	
2002	40	18	22		796	308	488	
2003	37	4	33		917	42	875	
2004	47	1	46		829	9	820	
2005	29	5	21	3	643	33	572	38
2006	26	8	15	3	478	99	334	45
2007	37	2	33	2	934	31	876	27
2008	52	6	44	2	1,110	106	975	29
2009	86	15	58	13	2,089	294	1,633	162
2010	60	22	28	10	1,196	464	611	121
2011	55	22	24	9	898	403	440	55
2012	59	24	27	8	1,240	537	663	40
2013**	24	2	19	3	492	42	441	9
Total	912	250	523	54	19,332	4,433	12,354	564

*No disaggregation of courses and participants was available from 1988 to 1991 and of participants in 1991.

** Data up to 2013 1st Quarter only.

IV. EVALUATION OF PSRTI TRAININGS

Evaluation of the PSRTI training courses show that expectations of local and foreign clients in terms of training contents, materials, facilities and administration of the courses were met. Resource persons were effective in delivering the course topics. Similarly, pre-tests and post-tests to measure the extent of knowledge acquired from the courses showed that positive gains were made upon completion of the training. However, no job behavior level and organizational level evaluations have been undertaken as evaluation at these levels requires greater budgetary allocation/resources.

Findings of the evaluation for foreign clients also revealed that most participants and sponsoring institutions prefer to have trainings be held in the Philippines. Some of the reasons cited were: (a) lower cost of the trainings conducted in the Philippines; (b) availability of knowledgeable and competent resource persons and adequate facilities for training; (c) Filipinos can easily adapt/relate to participants; (d) affordable cost of staying in Manila; (e) English spoken by Filipinos is more understandable to participants; and (f) handling of trainings, in general, is at par with those in developed countries.

V. CONCLUSION

While all the training programs evaluation reports on the training programs made by the participants were favorable, it is hoped that the impact of the trainings on the participants, though difficult, can be assessed. Further, advancement in technology must be harnessed in the delivery of statistical trainings.

The PSRTI takes pride in being an active player in developing statistical capacity in the region and looks forward to being more involved, taking into consideration the original mandate for which it was created as the statistical training arm of the Philippine Statistical System. The PSRTI must now build on the momentum that has been created and further the close linkages developed with partner institutions; and prepare for greater involvement in international statistical capacity building, especially with its participation in the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific.