

The Philippine Statistical System After Almost 3 Years of Transition: The Data Users' Perspective¹

By

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Abstract

The Philippine Statistical System (PSS) was reorganized by virtue of RA 10625, signed into law by President Benigno Simeon Aquino III on 12 September 2013 and its implementing rules and regulations approved by Arsenio M. Balisacan, Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) Board Chairperson on 11 December 2013. The reorganization merged the former major statistical agencies (MSAs), namely, the National Statistical Coordination Board, the National Statistics Office, the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics, and the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics into the PSA. It also created the Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute out of the former Statistical Research and Training Center.

The reorganization aimed to strengthen the PSS “in order to rationalize and promote efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of statistical services, maintain an integrated statistical system characterized by independence, objectivity and integrity so as to enhance responsiveness to the requirements of equitable national development, promote the orderly development of a statistical system capable of providing timely, accurate and useful data for the government and the public, and support decentralization through the establishment of the statistical infrastructure necessary to service the statistical needs of local development planning”.

After close to 3 years of transition period, a survey via email was conducted among data users as key respondents to assess their views on what has happened to the PSS in different areas of their statistical concerns as data users: relevance/responsiveness; timeliness, dissemination/communication of statistics, accessibility of data, etc. to determine if the objectives of the reorganization are being achieved from the users' perspectives.

In addition, the financial and manpower resources of the PSA vs the 4 former MSAs were examined.

The paper presents the results of the users' survey and assesses the gains/losses in terms of the financial and manpower resources of the former MSAs after the reorganization. It also provides a glimpse of the scores and ranking of the Philippines before and after the merger in the Statistical Capacity Indicators being monitored by the World Bank

Keywords: reorganization, objectives, transition period, data users, statistical concerns, financial and manpower resources, statistical capacity indicators

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² Former Secretary General, Assistant Secretary General, of the National Statistical Coordination Board, which is now part of the Philippine Statistics Authority. The author is grateful to the respondents who found time to fill out the questionnaires and for the encouragement, assistance, and support of a number of former colleagues in the Philippine Statistical System.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippine Statistical System (PSS) has gone thru a series of proposed organizational changes the latest of which resulted in the creation of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) out of the four former Major Statistical Agencies (MSA), namely, the National Statistics Office (NSO), the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS), the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics (BLES), and the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), under RA 10625. It also created the Philippine Statistical Research & Training Institute (PSRTI) out of the former Statistical Research & Training Center (SRTC).

The new organization basically came out of the work by a Special Committee³ to Review the Philippine Statistical System which was created to come up “with a set of recommendations on the overall improvement of the PSS in relation to its effectivity, efficiency, objectivity and integrity in the delivery of statistical products and services and services to the various clients and stakeholders”. Three MSAs, namely, the NSO, the BAS, and BLES, together with the former SRTC and NEDA supported the reorganization but the NSCB Technical Staff has from 1991 to 2012 consistently been against the merger of the data producing agencies and the statistical coordination office (see Annex 2016NCS-Reorg-01 for the 2008 NSCB TS Position Paper). RA 10625 was signed by Pres. Benigno Simeon Aquino III on 12 September 2013; the IRR was signed on 11 December 2013 by NEDA Director General; the first Interim National Statistician was appointed/took office on 09 January 2014; and the current National Statistician started office on 22 April 2014.

The immediately preceding reorganization attempt to merge the MSAs was vetoed by the then Pres. Corazon C. Aquino in 1992, essentially based on the objections from the NEDA, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Labor and Employment, and the NSCB Technical Staff.

The study tries to evaluate if the decision to merge the 4 MSAs had translated into greater user satisfaction with the PSS. It focuses on a survey of the assessment of key data users on the products and services associated with the 4 former MSAs and the PSA. It also asks the users’ perspective on the quality of the sectoral statistics produced by the PSS. The next section presents the survey methodology, followed by the limitations, the survey results, some related indicators, and finally the conclusions and recommendations.

II. The Survey of Users’ Perspectives on the New PSS: Methodology

³ The Committee was chaired by Dr. Vicente B. Valdepeñas with the following as members: Dr. Isidoro P. David, Dr. Mercedes B. Concepcion, Dr. Lisa Grace S. Bersales, and Dr. Cielito F. Habito.

The primary objectives of the survey are (1) to assess from the data users' perspective whether the quality of the products and services of the Philippine Statistical System (PSS) has improved during the first three years since the reorganization in 2014 under RA10625 that merged the former National Statistics Office (NSO), National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS), and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLES) into the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA); and (2) to gather information that can be useful to the PSS Management in further improving the products and services of the PSS.

A questionnaire was designed and tested with a number of former members of the PSS. Based on the test, the questionnaire was redesigned⁴ to make it more respondent-friendly. As a guide to the respondents in assessing the quality of products and services of the PSS, a copy of the **Statistics Canada Quality Guidelines (Fourth Edition – October 2003)** was included in the questionnaire (see Annex 2016NCS-Reorg-02 for the Questionnaire)

For the classification of the sectoral statistics, the Classification of Statistical Activities of the UNECE was partially adopted.

As the intention is to assess the data users' perspectives, a main consideration in drawing the sample of respondents is to ensure not only that they are knowledgeable about the statistics produced by the PSS but more importantly that they are actually using them. In other words, key respondents would be identified and random sampling would not be used. Also, to facilitate the data collection process, it was decided to collect data via email

The potential respondents were classified into the following categories:

1. Government (national and government corporations) – 27 institutions
2. Local Government Units – 11 LGUs
3. Research Institutions/Academic Community – 27 institutions, 14 individual researchers
4. Business Sector – 11 institutions
5. Media – 28 institutions
6. NGOs/Civil Society – 3 institutions
7. Development Partners/International Organizations – 10 institutions
8. Students – 7 universities
9. Others – 3 institutions

The plan was to analyze the survey responses using the groupings above but this was not done due to the low response rates.

The list of potential respondents was identified based on the following:

1. Author's personal knowledge of users of PSS statistics based on his experience as former NSCB Secretary General
2. List of participants during the National Convention on Statistics in 2013
3. List of participants/interviewees for the PSA-PARIS21 project on Informing a Data Revolution (IDR) conducted in 2014-2015

⁴ The final questionnaire could have been improved further by a clearer, less equivocal phrasing of some questions

4. List of interviewees suggested/ provided by some members of the Philippine statistical community
5. Availability of email addresses of the respondent

Thus, the sample is a convenience sample based on the author's appreciation of the potential respondent as a potentially knowledgeable user of PSS statistics.

The questionnaire was emailed on 31 July 2016 to the sample respondents who were informed of an initial deadline (15 August 2016) that would allow the completion of the paper in accordance with the NCS deadlines. However, follow-up emails were sent out, effectively extending the deadline two times. Also, additional respondents were suggested by members of the statistical community who were consulted on the matter.

A total of 216 questionnaires were sent out but 25 bounced back, reducing the sample to 191.

Although self-identification was optional on the part of the respondents, some of them did indicate their names on the questionnaires.

The questionnaires sent back by 2 respondents who seemed to have inconsistent responses were validated. It was realized that the way the questions were framed (Sections 2.1 and 2.2) may have been subject to two interpretations. One of the two respondents revised her answers accordingly.

Five respondents said that they were not/no longer that familiar with the PSS products and services and decided that it was not appropriate for them to fill up the questionnaire.

Five sampled users promised to send questionnaires but failed to do so by the final deadline.

Overall, there were 52 out of 191 respondents who provided item responses as of September 21, 2016 for a response rate of 27.2% (see Table 1.1)

III. Limitations of the Study

1. The sample is not a probability sample.
2. The survey results are based on the perspectives of key respondents as reflected in the questionnaires they sent back. Thus, the summary statistics may reflect the bias, if any, and/or professional interests of the respondents.

No weights are used, although some respondents may be more knowledgeable about the PSS products and services than others.

The messages of their remarks were not clearly communicated by some of the respondents.

3. The focus of the survey is on the products and services associated with the 4 former MSAs and the PSA, and 34 "sectoral statistics". The survey was conducted less than 3 years after the official start of the operations of the PSA, during which

period, the PSA spent much time with (re)organizational issues and lost several key staff to retirement/resignation.

4. The financial and manpower resources data cover only the period 2009-2016 for the 4 MSAs/PSA. They do not include the resources of the other agencies in the PSS.
5. The Statistical Capacity Indicators compiled by the World Bank has its methodological limitations.

IV. USERS' SURVEY RESULTS (see Annex 2016NCS-Reorg-03 for the Tabulations and Annex 2016NCS-Reorg-04 for the Remarks/Recommendations)

Respondents' Profile (see Tables 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3)

1. Among the 52 who responded and with item responses, 42.3% are from government; 25.0% are researchers/from universities; 19.2% are from development partners/international organizations, and 13.5% are from LGUs/media/NGOs and civil society/others. No (item) responses were received from the business sector.
2. 62% of the respondents are female.
3. The average age of the respondents is about 48 years with distribution as follows: Below 25 years old (3.8%); 25 to below 45 (34.6%); 45 to below 65 (55.8%); and 65 and over (5.8%).

Users' Assessment:

Subject to the limitations cited in Section III,

1. In summary, "Combined"⁵ responses showed the following (see Table 1 below):
 - 1.1. More than 3 out of 10 respondents think things have remained the same except for statistical coordination
 - 1.2. Between 2 and 3 out of 10 respondents think things have improved in user-friendliness, website accessibility and content, and in statistical coordination
 - 1.3. Less than 1 out of 10 respondents think things have worsened except for statistical coordination
 - 1.4. Less than 20% of the responses indicated "Too Early To Tell"
 - 1.5. More than 1/3 of the responses indicated "Don't Know/ No Basis" for sectoral statistics

Table 1: USERS' ASSESSMENT OF PSS PRODUCTS & SERVICES ¹						
	Better	Same	Worse	Too Early To Tell	Don't Know/ No Basis	No Choice Indicated
User-friendliness ²	22.6%	30.3%	7.2%	13.5%	20.2%	6.3%
Website	25.0%	34.6%	9.6%	4.8%	19.2%	6.7%

⁵ Just added all the responses

accessibility & content ²						
Statistical Coordination	28.8%	23.1%	15.4%	13.5%	11.5%	7.7%
Subnational Statistics	17.3%	40.4%	1.9%	17.3%	11.5%	11.5%
Sectoral Statistics ³	12.7%	36.2%	2.9%	5.3%	35.2%	7.7%
¹ Data collection done in August-September 2016. Responses received from 52 out of 191 key respondents (27%)						
² Limited to the products and services of the 4 former MSAs/PSA						
³ Covers 34 statistical areas						

2. In terms of user friendliness of statistical products and services and the website accessibility and content of the four former MSAs, many respondents are not familiar (those who checked Don't Know/No Basis) with BAS (40.4% for user-friendliness, and 34.6% for the website) and BLES (30.8% for user-friendliness, and 28.8% for the website) compared to the NSO and NSCB (less than 5% for user-friendliness and less than 8% for the website). (See Tables 2.1 and 2.2)
 - 2.1. Combining all the responses for the user friendliness of statistical products and services, "Same" received the highest percentage (30.3%), followed by "Better" with 22.6%. "Worse" received 7.2%.
 - 2.1.1. The user-friendliness of NSO-related products and services received the highest percentage of "Better" ratings (28.8%) compared to the other 3 MSAs. But it also received the highest percentage of "Worse" ratings (13.5%).
 - 2.1.2. The user-friendliness of NSCB-related products and services received the highest percentage of "Same" ratings (38.5%).
 - 2.2. In terms of the combined responses for the website accessibility and content, "Same" also received the highest percentage (34.6%) followed by "Better" (25.0%). "Worse" received 9.6%.
 - 2.2.1. Most of the respondents think the accessibility and content of the websites of the former NSO (40.4%), NSCB (40.4%), and BLES (30.8%) have remained the same. (See Table 2.2)
 - 2.2.2. In the case of the website of the former BAS, most respondents (34.6%) checked Don't Know/No Basis.
 - 2.2.3. Improvements were noticed by the most number of respondents (20 or 38.5%) on the website of the former NSO.
 - 2.2.4. Deterioration was noticed by the most number of respondents (7 or 13.5%) on the website of the former NSCB.
3. Less than 10% of the respondents think it is still too early to tell whether the quality of the website and the PSS sectoral products and services has improved. However, more respondents think it is too early to assess the user-friendliness of the products and services of the former NSO/NSCB (9-10 or 17-19% of the respondents), including statistical coordination (13.5%) and subnational statistics (17.3%). (See Tables 2.2 and 2.3)

4. Statistical coordination deteriorated the most (according to 15.4% of the respondents), compared to user-friendliness (less than 14%), website accessibility and content (less than 14%), and subnational statistics (less than 2%). However, most respondents think statistical coordination has also become “Better” (15 or 28.8% of the respondents) compared to 23.1% for “Same” and 15.4% for “Worse” . (See Table 2.3)
5. Most of the respondents (21 or 40.4%) consider the state of subnational statistics to have remained the same; 9 or 17.3% think subnational statistics have improved and only 1 respondent said it had become worse. (See Table 4)
6. Sectoral Statistics (34): (See Table 3)
 - 6.1. Things have improved according to more than 20% of the respondents only in the following areas: Agricultural Statistics (23.1%); Civil Registration System (birth/death/marriage certificates) (38.5%); and Poverty Statistics (26.9%).
 - 6.2. At least 50% of the respondents think things have remained the same in the following areas: Employment/Unemployment/Underemployment Rates (57.7%); Income and Consumption Statistics (53.8%); National Accounts (51.9%); Population and Migration Statistics (55.8%); and Small Area (Provincial, Municipal, Other Sectoral) Statistics (50.0%).
 - 6.3. Less than 8% of the respondents (less than 5 of 52) think things have worsened in the sectoral statistics. Those that deteriorated according to 3-4 respondents are Agricultural Statistics; Education Statistics; Employment/Unemployment/Underemployment Rates; Health Statistics; MDGs/SDGs; and Poverty Statistics.
 - 6.4. At least 50% checked Don't Know/No Basis in the assessment of the following sectoral statistics: Culture Statistics (63.5%); Energy Statistics (55.8%); Fishery Statistics (51.9%); Forestry Statistics (53.8%); Information Society Statistics (55.8%); Justice and Crime Statistics (53.8%); and Transport Statistics (50.0%).
 - 6.5. In assessing progress in the 34 sectoral statistics, more respondents checked Don't Know/No Basis than the other choices (better, same, worse, too early to tell) in 17 areas including maybe surprisingly, Agricultural Statistics; Balance of Payments Statistics; Banking, Insurance, and Financial Statistics; Environmental Statistics/Accounts; Mining, Manufacturing and Construction Statistics; Science, Technology, and Innovation Statistics; and Tourism statistics. It may also be surprising to find out that there are more respondents who know about governance statistics and informal sector statistics than those who checked Don't Know/ No basis.

Users' Remarks:

The remarks made by the respondents are generally meant to support the ratings they gave on the various dimensions being assessed. Some of the remarks **essentially mentioned by at least two respondents**, some of which are inconsistent with each other include the following (generally copied and pasted from the questionnaire):

1. Former NSO-related Products and Services:

- 1.1. Excel files on CPI used to be available on NSO website; now only pdf files area available. Excel files don't require re-inputting data on part of user.
- 1.2. Long response time; seems to have more red tape
2. Former NSCB-related Products and Services:
 - 2.1. Former products/info not clearly linked nor easily retrieved in (the new) website. We miss the articles on "Statistically Speaking"/ Beyond the Numbers, etc. Are there no technical notes or technical papers now being produced by PSA?
3. Former BAS-related Products and Services: no remark mentioned more than once
4. Former BLES-related Products and Services: no remark mentioned more than once
5. Websites: no remark mentioned more than once
6. Statistical Coordination:
 - 6.1. Easier
 - 6.2. It seems there is less consultation with experts nowadays on methodologies/techniques by PSA. Are inter-agency committees still active?
 - 6.3. Coordinating with the unit under the former BAS was too challenging especially during the transition period.
7. Subnational Statistics:
 - 7.1. Very limited statistics is available with subnational disaggregation (e.g., GRDP, CPI, SAE poverty, GGI, regional/provincial)
8. Sectoral Statistics:
 - 8.1. Faster delivery (of civil registration services)
 - 8.2. Same doesn't mean it's good; still lacking
 - 8.3. Hard to navigate website to find past LFS results
 - 8.4. There's less products released now by BLES component of PSA
 - 8.5. Limited information (for some sectors) is available.
 - 8.6. Not very evident SDGs in the homepage
 - 8.7. It seems that the population figures were released earlier than the 2010 figures
9. Good Products/Services No Longer Being Produced
 - 9.1. Products/ services we need are still being provided
 - 9.2. None
 - 9.3. Leading indicators have not been updated
 - 9.4. National Statistical Information Center
 - 9.5. Technical papers/notes
 - 9.6. Statistical articles meant to communicate more to general users/public (e.g., Statistically Speaking articles, Sexy Statistics)
10. Good New Products/Services
 - 10.1. None

Users' Recommendations:

The recommendations made by the respondents were categorized by area, some of which may have been misclassified or better classified under a different category. Some of the recommendations are the following (not necessarily mentioned by at least two respondents, also essentially copied and pasted from the questionnaire):

1. Management & Coordination
 - 1.1. PSA should be looking at the law that created it and see what needs correction
 - 1.2. Should be clear on the strategic direction of the PSA - both for the system and internally for the organization
 - 1.3. Strengthen the PSA as an institution by adopting results-based management principles and practices, including instituting monitoring and evaluation of its own programs as a way to learn, promote accountability, and improve
 - 1.4. Initiate measures to strengthen internal (inter-departmental) coordination for increased cohesiveness and for seamless exchange of data, ideas, knowledge, and technology
 - 1.5. Prioritize certain recommendations for improvement of the PSS such as serious and committed action on improving local level statistics
 - 1.6. Consider institutional partnerships and outsourcing options with other institutions (public/private/NGOs; academics/technology service providers) even for basic data collection activities to address long identified data gaps and emerging information needs and to widen scope of statistical capacity
 - 1.7. At the end of the day, are the services being delivered and outputs being produced with the end user in mind from the start until the end of the process? Clear example: PSA website. It exists, yes. It has many links, yes. But mostly (if not, all) of outputs/pages mainly consolidated (only) from the 4 separate agencies website.
 - 1.8. Target the source of the problem to find solution for the problems.
 - 1.9. Should manpower complement already allow, posting of employees in statistical units of agencies should be made to help /enhance generation of statistics by these agencies (part of the Statistics Act).
 - 1.10. In regard to poverty statistics, perhaps PSA should assess whether there indeed is a need for semestral estimates and whether increased frequency is obtained at the expense of quality of other products and services, if not the poverty statistics itself.
2. Statistical Capacity Building
 - 2.1. Technical staff should be capacitated/trained to evaluate methodologies and write technical papers. This will redound to their skills development and personal improvement.
 - 2.2. Capacitate and involve the local government units (IGUs).
3. Statistics/ Indicators/ Publications
 - 3.1. Measure how economic growth translates into improvement in the quality of life in terms of assets, consumption, etc.
 - 3.2. Develop critical indicators such as the MPI, SP-related indicators, PWD-related indicators, and informal sector data. PUF files should be readily accessible and available to oversight agencies.
 - 3.3. Lead the development/harmonization of Statistical Framework in ASEAN Community
 - 3.4. Data on Elderly. (Active Ageing Index)
 - 3.5. Development of Social Protection Index
 - 3.6. Data requirements for measuring disaster resiliency of the Philippines
 - 3.7. Statistical Publication should be disseminated per Province, to make PSS more accessible and sustainable to the public.

4. Data Accessibility/ Dissemination/ Pricing
 - 4.1. Open sharing of data
 - 4.2. We appreciate the write-ups that you provide on statistics, such as the census of the population. However, for us researchers, the complete actual results are more relevant... and would appreciate having online access to the tables and charts, etc. on the complete results.
 - 4.3. Website integration from the former NSO, NSCB, BAS and BLES needs considerable improvement.. It seems the NSO website (which was not very good) subsumed all the website content... there should be better content management
 - 4.4. Should make information on new, emerging concerns more accessible. Examples: SDG information? Under the Statistics link on the PSA website - environment statistics is not a major area of statistics???
 - 4.5. Crime and justice statistics online are not as easily accessed in the new website. Most crime statistics in the website are not up to date (e.g., crime rates available is only until 2010).
 - 4.6. I hope the data will be in excel form and not pdf. You buy dataset in pdf format and you end up spending up calculating the sums of values and encoding them.
 - 4.7. ASPBI/CPBI datasets are expensive.
 - 4.8. Free merge files of FIES and LFS to the public or in the academe. For the appreciation of the students in several colleges/universities fees must wave or provide a student discount.
 - 4.9. Make public use files affordable and easier to access
5. Timeliness/ Other Quality Dimensions
 - 5.1. Improve timeliness, consistency in release and dissemination of statistics
 - 5.2. Timely and regular updating of data in the website (e.g. simple literacy data in the website as of 2008 when 2013 result is already available)
 - 5.3. Early release of updated data on Population and Housing for CY 2015 and the Labor Force for Local Government Units such as the Provinces and Municipalities.
 - 5.4. I do hope you can provide data at least during the past 10 years for comparison purposes.
6. Services
 - 6.1. Complete details of statistical figures should be made available to the public. This is to provide them enough understanding on how the official statistics is being derived. This will strengthen the public trust and confidence on the official statistics since they appreciate how data collection is being done.
 - 6.2. Should start (or have they started?) forms review and clearance for administrative based data to maximize its use.
 - 6.3. PSA staff should make it a habit to respond to emails, to even acknowledge receipt of emails. It takes months to find out if requests are attended to
 - 6.4. Payment should be addressed. When you go to the library to buy dataset, you can get your OR only after another day so you need to come back to get your OR and this is a waste of time
 - 6.5. Make available shapefiles of enumeration areas (EAs) similar to those provided by its US Census counterpart
 - 6.6. Instruction materials for data processing from PUF

- 6.7. More background information on surveys (i.e., sampling methodology, variables) much more current and complete
- 6.8. Establish a central database system which can provide updated sectoral statistics
- 7. Subnational statistics/data disaggregation
 - 7.1. Establish and develop sub-national statistics
 - 7.2. More sub-regional data reports (provincial level) on employment, tourism, energy, etc
 - 7.3. As government worker on gender equality and women's empowerment I would appreciate it if all statistical tables produced, whenever applicable, are sex-disaggregated and accessible from national down to provincial levels. Disaggregation by ethnicity would also be helpful
 - 7.4. We highly appreciate the availability of regional/provincial quickstat and countryside in figures. However, especially for the latter, updating of geographically-disaggregated indicators is not frequently done
 - 7.5. Generate data on Provincial Income, Expenditures and Savings
 - 7.6. Provide provincial product accounts/ GDP estimates at the provincial level.
 - 7.7. Data on migration (in and out), IPs, PWDs, etc., should be made available at the subnational level.
- 8. Surveys/ Censuses/ Administrative-based Data
 - 8.1. Panel data for HH/indvl level surveys
 - 8.2. Updating of RSBSA, CAF, NHTS, etc., should be done regularly
 - 8.3. Develop business register for a comprehensive sampling frame that will be used by all agencies/offices conducting enterprise/establishment surveys
 - 8.4. Provide more opportunities to revise questionnaires or to add rider questions that are important for other NGAs
 - 8.5. The sample sizes of APIS varied across years and hence, comparison of estimates across time may not be as effective. Hope that the sampling errors of the differences were computed correctly, if ever they were computed at all
 - 8.6. Maintain same variables and variable names of FIES surveys. Some of the variables that used to be in earlier PUFs of FIES are no longer included in 2012 FIES
 - 8.7. Surveys like FIEMMS, NDHS, FIES, etc., should be conducted annually
- 9. Statistical Advocacy
 - 9.1. Training Workshop/Advocacy should be implemented by the PSA for the Province and Municipality to become aware of the importance of the Philippine Statistical System (PSS) especially to the Government

V. SOME RELATED INDICATORS

1. Resources (See Table 5)

Although RA10625 was signed into law on 12 September 2013 and the first Interim National Statistician was appointed in January 2014, the 4 MSAs had their separate budgets in the GAA.

- 1.1. In terms of the financial resources before the merger, the budgetary increases of the smaller MSAs (NSCB and BLES) were smaller (no higher

than single digit) compared to the increases in the total budget of the 4 MSAs or the two bigger MSAs (up to triple digit).

However, while a 63% budgetary increase was granted to the PSA in 2015⁶, the compounded annual rate of increase was only 5% from 2014 to 2016 and 10% from 2009 to 2016, which is smaller than the total increases that the 4 MSAs received before the merger (annual rate of 12% from 2009 to 2014). In fact, the 2016 PSA budget was higher than the 2014 combined budget of the 4 MSAs by less than 10%.

- 1.2. Human resources- wise, in terms of filled positions, except for BLES, the three other MSAs were experiencing reduction in personnel of up to 7% per year from 2009 to 2014, with slightly bigger decreases for BAS and NSCB.

The reduction in total filled positions for the PSA substantially increased to 36% in 2015 with the retirement of many personnel who availed of the attractive retirement package offered by RA10625. And in 2016, the level of filled positions represented only 68% of that in 2014.

2. World Bank (WB) Statistical Capacity Indicators (SCI) (SeeTable 6)

The WB SCI Methodology surely has its limitations but until 2013 the Philippines did well in this metric. The story for 2014 and 2015 is sad.

- 2.1. Starting at Rank 3 in 2004 among 8 ASEAN Member States (AMS)⁷ with a score of 81.1, the Philippines rose to Rank 1 in 2005 and in each year from 2008 to 2013.
- 2.2. In 2013, the Philippines had a score of 84.4, followed by Indonesia and Thailand with 80.0 each, and Vietnam with 74.4.
- 2.3. In 2014, the score of the Philippines substantially went down to 77.8, and lost its No. 1 ranking to both Indonesia and Thailand. In addition, its 10-percentage point advantage in 2013 over Vietnam got whittled down to less than 1 percentage point.
- 2.4. In 2015, the score of the Philippines recovered to 82.2 but not enough to recover its No. 1 ranking from Thailand and Indonesia, which came in 1st and 2nd, respectively. The sad thing is that Vietnam even edged the Philippines for third place, although barely.
- 2.5. Consequently, from an average ranking from 2004-2013 that was ahead of all the 8 AMS, the average ranking of the Philippines for 2004-2015 was only second to Indonesia with third-placed Thailand closing in on the Philippines.

3. Philippine Involvement in the International Statistical Community

Surely, before the merger, the Philippines had already been very active in the international statistical community taking on various roles as Chair/ Co-Chair/Vice Chair/Member of various committees created to address statistical challenges. This resulted, among others, in many international consultancy opportunities for Filipino statisticians. After the merger, the Philippines was invited/elected to play

⁶ A quinquennial Census of Population was conducted in 2015.

⁷ Brunei Darussalam and Singapore are not included in the WB Tables

prominent and new roles including among others, as Chair of the PARIS21 Executive Committee, Co-Chair of the IAEG-SDGs of the UN Statistical Commission, and Member of the Global Working Group on Big Data, and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific Governing Council.

Strictly speaking, the Philippines has the option to decline the invitation by the different international organizations for it to take on the leadership positions offered. But these invitations clearly are a form of recognition of what the Philippines can contribute to statistical development in the global and regional arenas. It is an opportunity and an honor that is difficult and which the author considers inadvisable to let pass.

Some stakeholders of the PSS have raised concerns about the frequent travels of the PSA Management. But when the Philippines accepted these leadership roles in the international statistical community, it naturally came with the requirement for the National Statistician and/or her team to go on foreign travels. While fully recognizing that they have resulted in less time for the PSA Management to address local PSS issues, the author considers it somewhat unfair that the foreign travels of the PSA Management Team have become an issue. They are part and parcel of the role of the Philippines as a key player in the global statistical system and creates goodwill for the country in the community of nations. In the case of the former NSCB, it took on these challenges with an unwritten policy at least until 2012 that NSCB officials/staff would as much as possible, accept such invitations only if travel grants were provided.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Financial resources-wise, the merger appears to have been good for the two smaller former MSAs, namely, NSCB and BLES, which could have “benefitted” from the bigger budgetary increases of NSO and BAS.

However, the less than 10% increase in the budget of the PSA in 2016 compared to the combined budget of the 4 MSAs in 2014 does not augur well for the future of the PSA. It is certainly not clear that the increases in the total financial resources of the 4 MSAs have been higher after the merger than before the merger and it will be interesting to watch over the approved budget of the PSA in 2017.

2. Human resources-wise, with the ever-increasing demand for more and higher-quality statistics, it is difficult to imagine that the level of filled positions in 2016 at 68% of that in 2014 will be able to cope with the challenges that the PSA faces.

The replacement of the cadre of trained statisticians who retired under RA10625 will certainly be a big challenge to the PSA.

3. There are very few data users who are very familiar with the products and services of the PSS. Even those who might have been expected to know about the PSS outputs are not.

4. The media is a heavy user of information but is one of the least cooperative groups in creating information, based on the survey results. This could very well be part of the reason why the Freedom of Information Bill has taken so long to pass.
5. As may have been expected, users have conflicting perspectives/views on the same quality dimension being assessed.
6. Respondents seem to be least familiar with BAS and BLES (and/or their products and services) among the 4 MSAs.
7. Many users saw improvements from the former 4 MSAs to the PSA. However, the fact that more than 20% of the respondents do not consider it too early to assess the changes in the PSS after the merger of the 4 MSAs, may indicate that after almost three years of the PSA, users are expecting the improvements envisioned in RA 10625 but which have not yet happened (big proportion of respondents who gave a "Same" rating).
8. From the overall users' ratings, the reorganization seems to have resulted in the best improvements in terms of the products and services of the former NSO compared to the 3 other former MSAs, although those who provided remarks thought the quality of NSO products/services had suffered.
9. While statistical coordination is considered to have worsened the most compared to user-friendliness, website accessibility and content, and subnational statistics, it is still considered to have become better by most of the respondents.
10. Some of the respondents raised very challenging recommendations for the PSA/PSS.
11. Finally, it is recommended that greater focus be given by the PSA on the following:
 - 11.1. Improvements in subnational statistics and statistical coordination;
 - 11.2. Statistical advocacy; in particular, better dissemination of and advocacy for the products and services associated with the former BAS and BLES;
 - 11.3. Production and/or improved dissemination of statistics on Culture, Energy, Fishery, Forestry, Information Society, Justice and Crime, and Transport;
 - 11.4. Considering the directive of the President to Cabinet officials to improve/ streamline government processes, and considering the observation by a number of respondents about the declining quality of some of the PSA products/ services, the PSA Management Team should insure that this issue is addressed.
 - 11.5. Notwithstanding the limitations of the WB SCI Scores, the PSA should monitor and try to improve on its performance including its global and regional ranking on this metric of statistical capacity;
 - 11.6. Serious consideration of some of the respondents' remarks and recommendations, particularly the many areas which received "Same" rating; and
 - 11.7. Truly enhancing the responsiveness and relevance of the PSA to users' needs.

References

Partial List of Media Practitioners
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Acronyms

AMS	ASEAN Member States
BAS	Bureau of Agricultural Statistics
BLES	Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics
CRESS	Country Report on Support to Statistics
GAA	General Appropriations Act
IAEG	InterAgency Expert Group
IDR	Informing a Data Revolution
LGU	Local Government Unit
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MSA	Major Statistical Agency
NCS	National Convention on Statistics
NEDA	National Economic & Development Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSCB	National Statistical Coordination Board
NSO	National Statistics Office
PARIS21	Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21 st Century
PPDO	Provincial Planning & Development Office
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority
PSRTI	Philippine Statistical Research & Training Institute
PSS	Philippine Statistical System
RA	Republic Act
SCI	Statistical Capacity Indicators
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRTC	Statistical Research & Training Center
UN	United Nations
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WB	World Bank