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**SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM OF THE RE-ENGINEERING THE GOVERNMENT
STATISTICAL SERVICES PROJECT PHASE II: AN EVALUATION**

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of the evaluation of the scholarship program under the Re-engineering the Government Statistical Services Project Phase II (RGSSP II) which was implemented in 2001 under the initiative of the National Statistical Coordination Board. This evaluation was undertaken to ensure the success of similar programs that will be implemented in the future.

After consultation with different stakeholders, results showed that the RGSSP II scholarship program performed well in terms of the contribution of the scholars to the statistical community. However, the RGSSP II scholarship program was found to be not successful in terms of several performance indicators. Likewise, the evaluation highlighted the good practice of extending academic support to the scholars. It also identified issues encountered in the implementation of the RGSSP II scholarship program which include the lack of a thorough screening process for the applicants, poor safekeeping of documents pertaining to the scholarship program, and lax enforcement of responsibilities of scholars as stipulated in their service contracts.

1. Introduction

The Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute (PSRTI) has been mandated to provide scholarships, financial and other forms of assistance to build statistical manpower and enhance training and statistical research and development. This is found in Article 30e of Republic Act 10625 otherwise known as The Philippine Statistical Act of 2013. For PSRTI to fulfil its mandate, they have to implement programs geared towards statistical capacity building.

To ensure the success of programs that they will be implementing, PSRTI saw the need for an evaluation of similar programs that provided scholarships to the Philippine Statistical System (PSS). One such program was under the Re-engineering the Government Statistical Services Project Phase II (RGSSP II) which was implemented in 2001. It aimed to increase the cadre of statistical personnel with masteral and doctoral degrees in order to address the professional requirements of PSS. It was initiated by the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) with joint support from the Government of the Philippines and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through its Policy Training and Technical Assistance Facility.

Thus, this undertaking aimed to evaluate the scholarship program of RGSSP II. Specifically, it sought to determine the effectiveness of RGSSP II in meeting its expected outcomes, identify good practices and issues/problems encountered in the implementation of RGSSP II, and recommend strategies and policies on how to implement similar programs in the future.

2. Evaluation Methodology

Several methodologies were employed to uncover information relevant for this undertaking. Available and relevant documents on RGSSP II scholarship program (e.g. service contracts, minutes of meetings and the like) were reviewed to assist in the evaluation on the implementation of the RGSSP II scholarship program, assessment of the status of RGSSP II scholars, and review of the financial standing of the program. A census was undertaken in order to get quantitative and qualitative data regarding the experiences of RGSSP II scholars. Focus group discussions (FGD) with RGSSP II scholars were likewise conducted to clarify information collected from the census. Personal interviews were carried out for scholars who were not able to join the FGD. Members of the scholarship steering committee involved in the implementation of RGSSP II were invited to join the FGD to solicit inputs regarding the program (e.g., good practices, shortcomings).

All information were utilized in evaluating the RGSSP II scholarship program. The following indicators were used in evaluating its effectiveness: graduation rate, average time-to-degree, drop-out rate, percentage of RGSSP II scholars with publications, and percentage of RGSSP II scholars with a more active participation in the statistical activities of their nominating agencies.

3. The Re-engineering the Government Statistical Services Project Phase II

Program Description In 2001, NSCB administered the RGSSP which was jointly funded by CIDA and the government. RGSSP aimed to invest on human resources, technology and systems development towards long-term efficiency and to develop a culture of excellence and entrepreneurial spirit in PSS. It consisted of two modules, the Human Resources Development (HRD) module and the Research and Development module. The offering of a scholarship program for five doctoral and 10 masteral programs in statistics is provided for under the HRD module. This scholarship program operated for five years starting in school year 2001-2002.

Program Administration The former Statistical Research and Training Center (SRTC), being the training arm of PSS, was tasked to coordinate the planning, implementation and monitoring of the scholarship program. Besides, SRTC was, the consensus, the most appropriate, neutral and objective statistical agency to handle the scholarship program.

A scholarship steering committee/project management team was formed with the head of SRTC as chair and the heads of the major statistical agencies as members. This committee, aside from approving policies, rules, guidelines, and contracts on scholarship program, awards scholarship grants to successful nominees.

A scholarship secretariat was formed composed of SRTC personnel that assisted the scholarship steering committee. These are composed of a project director, project manager, and a project assistant. Their responsibilities included the following:

- formulate/update policies, rules, guidelines, and contracts on scholarship program for approval by the scholarship steering committee;

- implement approved policies, rules and guidelines on scholarship program;
- coordinate the implementation of scholarship program with academic institutions and scholarship committees of various statistical agencies;
- prepare and disseminate nomination forms including guidelines on scholarship program to various statistical agencies;
- review/verify qualifications of nominees;
- endorse nominees for scholarship grants;
- coordinate release of grants (tuition fee, book allowance, monthly stipend, fund for local travel, dissertation and thesis allowance) to nominees on scheduled dates;
- monitor and evaluate performance of scholars;
- regularly report to the scholarship steering committee the implementation of scholarship program; and
- in coordination with the academic institution, provide a suggested schedule for grantees in completing the thesis/dissertation, and in the case of doctorate thesis, schedule for candidacy completion.

Likewise, each major statistical agency established its own scholarship committee composed of key officials of the agency and the human resource management/personnel officer or any duly designated personnel. This committee was tasked the following:

- disseminate policies, rules and guidelines on scholarship program;
- distribute nomination forms to interested applicants;
- inform applicants on the benefits/privileges entitled to as well as responsibilities abounding the scholar;
- screen agency applicants for nomination to scholarship program;
- submit a list of possible agency nominees to the head of statistical agency for selection and endorsement to the scholarship secretariat;
- submit list of final agency nominees to the scholarship secretariat including pertinent documents;
- coordinate with the scholarship secretariat on the monitoring and evaluation of agency scholars;
- submit regular reports on agency scholars to the scholarship secretariat;
- coordinate with mother unit of grantee regarding service requirements to the nominating statistical agency (in cases where the grantee is an employee within the department but not of the nominating statistical agency); and,
- assist the scholarship secretariat in the implementation of other aspects of the scholarship program in the agency.

Program Beneficiaries and Selection Process This scholarship program was open to statistical personnel coming from the five major statistical agencies operating in PSS at that time: Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS), Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics (BLES), National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), National Statistics Office (NSO) and SRTC. Minimum requirements of candidates for the MS and PhD programs are presented below.

Minimum Requirements of Nominees to the Graduate Programs

PROGRAM	
MS	PhD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have a Bachelor’s degree in Statistics or related field from a college or university of good standing; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have a Master of Science degree in Statistics from a college or university of good standing;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have completed at least 10 units of calculus in the undergraduate or diploma course; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have working knowledge in the use of computers (to be certified by agency head);
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have good working knowledge of linear/matrix algebra; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have at least two years of work experience with the nominating statistical agency or department of the nominating statistical agency in a permanent status;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have working knowledge in the use of computers (to be certified by agency head) ; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have a very satisfactory (VS) or better rating for the last two rating periods prior to the application;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have at least 3 units of programming in the undergraduate or diploma course; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be in good health; and
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have at least two years of work experience with the nominating statistical agency or department of the nominating statistical agency in a permanent status; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have no pending administrative case.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have a very satisfactory (VS) or better rating for the last two rating periods prior to the application; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be in good health; and 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have no pending administrative case. 	

Applicants for the scholarship grant applied through the agency scholarship committee. Nomination forms for the scholarship grants were used for such purpose and were made available to human resource management/personnel officer or any duly designated personnel of each statistical agency. The agency scholarship committee convened to screen prospective applicants. The list of qualified applicants was then forwarded to the head of the agency. The agency head selected the final agency nominee(s) and forwarded the final list of agency nominees to the scholarship secretariat three months prior to the start of the school year. The scholarship secretariat screened the final nominee(s) from the major statistical agencies and selected the final list of RGSSP II scholars.

Program Benefits RGSSP II scholarship benefits and privileges include (1) actual matriculation/tuition fees, (2) monthly stipend (Php 5,000 for MS and Php 6,000 for PhD), (3) book allowance per semester (Php 3,000 for MS and Php 6,000 for PhD), (4) local

transportation allowance (Php 5,000 per year), (5) group accident insurance, and (6) thesis/dissertation allowance (Php 30,000 for MS and Php 60,000 for PhD).

Scholar's Responsibilities Successful applicants/scholars were expected to take their graduate studies in statistics at the following higher educational institutions: (1) UP School of Statistics (UPSS) at UP Diliman, Quezon City, and (2) UP Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) at UP Los Baños, Laguna. Furthermore, the scholars were expected to:

- keep up with the necessary standards of scholarship;
- conduct himself/herself in such a manner as not to bring disgrace or dishonour to himself/herself, his/her agency, and the statistical profession;
- take the full academic load per term;
- maintain a grade of 2.0 or better in all subjects for the MS grantee, and 1.75 or better for the PhD grantee;
- being a full-time student, relieve himself/herself from distracting activities such as consultancies or other extra-curricular activities to ensure the completion of the degree within allotted period (2 years for MS and 4 years for PhD);
- follow strictly his/her schedule for completing his/her candidacy, status reporting on thesis/dissertation writing and thesis/dissertation completion and defense as recommended by the scholarship secretariat and the Graduate Program Director of the academic institution where he/she is studying;
- include a statement acknowledging support in the thesis/dissertation;
- remain in the employ of the nominating statistical agency (or its department) which has endorsed him/her for the grant and for which the grant has been accommodated for the entire duration of the grant;
- serve his/her nominating agency for a period of not less than two (2) years for every year of scholarship or a portion thereof in excess of six (6) months;
- submit to the head of his/her nominating agency and to the scholarship secretariat at the end of each term his/her official transcript of grades, certificate of performance or its equivalent;
- submit a formal request to his/her nominating agency, if there is sufficient reason, for the extension of the his/her original scholarship award with justification and recommendation from his/her program adviser and head of nominating agency six (6) months prior to the expected end of his/her term;
- report to his/her nominating agency upon the completion of his/her scholarship grant;
- submit to his/her nominating agency and the scholarship secretariat within 30 days after return to duty a two-page narrative re-entry program covering: course description, plans/activities upon return to work, perceived weakness(es) of the nominating agency, area(s) for improvement in the nominating agency, recommendation(s) on how to improve the services provided by the nominating agency, resources needed to implement plans, and flexibilities desired to achieve maximum performance of duty;
- submit to his/her nominating agency and scholarship secretariat a completion report of his/her scholarship within sixty (60) days after his/her return to duty;
- continuously serve the nominating agency for at least one-half of the required time before seeking another grant;

- refund the scholarship program through SRTC the total scholarship financial support released to him/her with interest, in case he/she fails to comply with the foregoing terms and conditions through his/her fault or wilful neglect, failure of grades, resignation, voluntary retirement, separation from service or other causes within his/her control. The interest shall be computed at 11.0% of the total amount compounded annually. He/she has the option to refund the total amount on an instalment basis for a maximum duration of up to two years. The interest accrued from the total financial assistance received by the grantee will take effect on the first semester of the first academic year that grantee was enrolled;
- refund the nominating statistical agency (or its department) the total amount of salary he/she received for the entire duration of the scholarship or continuously serve the nominating statistical agency an equivalent of one year for every year of scholarship or a portion thereof in excess of six months on top of his/her required service to the nominating statistical agency, in case of non-completion of the scholarship program; and
- elect/designate a guarantor who shall sign a co-maker's statement.

4. Results of Evaluation

Performance Indicators

The RGSSP II scholarship program was evaluated in terms of several performance indicators. Standard measures include the completion rates, drop-out rates, and time-to-degree. In addition, the percentage of RGSSP II scholars with publications, and the percentage of scholars with a more active participation in statistical activities in nominating agency were generated.

Completion rate is the percentage of RGSSP II scholars who completed their MS or PhD Statistics degrees. Particularly for MS Statistics, completion rate for the RGSSP II scholarship program is low (Table 1). Nonetheless, comparison showed that this was not significantly different with those of the completion rates for Engineering Research and Development for Technology (ERDT) scholarship program of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) at 5% level of significance (Table 2).

Table 1. Performance Indicators of RGSSP II Scholarship Program by Degree

MEASURE	MS	PhD
Completion Rate (%) ^a	21.4	50.0
Drop-out Rate (%) ^{a,b}	28.6	50.0
Average time-to-degree (semesters) ^b	10.7	no data
Percentage with publications (%) ^b	42.9	no data
Percentage with more active participation in statistical activities in agency (%) ^b	71.4	no data

SOURCE: ^a Survey of RGSSP II Scholars (2016); ^b RGSSP II files

Table 2. ERDT Completion Rates (%) by Degree for Different Programs at UPD

SCHOOL YEAR	MS	PhD
2010-2011	29.1 (0.5666)	16.7 (0.2636)
2011-2012	49.3 (0.0546)	20.0 (0.3204)
2012-2013	19.2 (0.8416)	23.1 (0.3872)

SOURCE: Guevara (2013)

Note: Numbers inside parenthesis are *p-values* comparing completion rates for RGSSP II and ERDT scholarship programs.

Time-to-degree refers to the length of time, i.e. number of semesters, for scholars to complete the scholarship requirements of RGSSP II. The RGSSP II scholars reported an average time-to-degree of 10.7 semesters (Table 1). This is more than the allotted period for an MS Statistics degree even after including the 1-year extension granted to the scholars.

Drop-out rate is the percentage of scholars who left the RGSSP II scholarship program for any reason as well as those scholars who have no more plans of completing the scholarship requirements. Table 1 presents the drop-out rates for the RGSSP II scholarship program for the MS and PhD Statistics degrees. These drop-out rates are high which is expected considering that high drop-out rates are likewise reported in elementary (34%), high school (34.8%), and college (46.5%) based on the 2008 data from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) (Muzones and De Jesus, 2009).

Factors that might have affected the low completion rates, long average time-to-degree, and high drop-out rates were investigated. Profiles of the RGSSP II scholars by status of scholarship are presented in Tables 3 and 4. In almost all the characteristics collected, the distributions among the different status of the scholars in the RGSSP II scholarship program were similar. Except for the number of years the scholars have been working in their nominating agencies and the nature of their work were there are striking differences.

Table 3. Personal Background of RGSSP II Scholars by Status

CHARACTERISTIC	STATUS					
	Completed (n=3)		Withdrew (n=1)		Not Completed (n=3)	
	MEAN	STDEV	MEAN	STDEV	MEAN	STDEV
Age when RGSSP II scholarship was received (years)	31.7	9.8	27	-	32.3	3.8
Number of Children of Married Scholars	3.5	0.7	1	-	3	-
Number of Years Working in Statistical Agency	23.3	11.0	10	-	8	7.1

SOURCE: Survey of RGSSP II Scholars (2016)

Table 4. Percentage Distribution of Characteristics of RGSSP II Scholars by Status

CHARACTERISTIC	STATUS		
	Completed (n=3)	Withdrew (n=1)	Not Completed (n=3)
Gender			
Female	100	0	67
Male	0	100	33
Marital Status			
Single	33.3	0	66.7
Married, Living with Family	66.7	100	33.3
Undergraduate Degree			
Statistics/Applied Statistics	33.3	100	66.7
Mathematics/Applied Mathematics	66.7	0	33.3
With Scholarship Pursuing Undergraduate Degree			
No	33.3	0	66.7
Yes	66.7	100	33.3
Nature of Work at Statistical Agency Prior to Being a Scholar			
Research	50	28.6	0
Planning	50	28.6	0
Data Collection / Management / Cleaning / Validation	100	71.4	50
Data Analysis and Table Generation	100	71.4	50
Data Dissemination	100	57.1	0
Training	100	42.9	0

SOURCE: Survey of RGSSP II Scholars (2016)

Other measures looked into to assess the effectiveness of the RGSSP II scholarship program were the percentage of scholars with publications, and the percentage of scholars with a more active participation in the statistical activities of their nominating agencies. Both percentages are high which somehow offset the previous estimates of standard performance indicators (Table 1).

Strengths of the RGSSP II Scholarship Program

Several strengths in the implementation of the RGSSP II scholarship program were identified. These could serve as good practices which PSRTI can imitate when implementing similar scholarship programs.

- **Program Administration** The scholarship steering committee, in their commitment to help scholars complete the scholarship requirements of RGSSP II, extended by one year the allotted period for earning their MS and PhD Statistics degrees. This resulted to an amendment in their scholarship service contracts. This was done after consultation with the academic institutions offering the degrees.

- **Program Support and Benefits** The benefits and privileges of the RGSSP II scholarship program which included the usual (1) actual matriculation/tuition fees, (2) monthly stipend, (3) book allowance per semester, (4) local transportation allowance, (5) group accident insurance, and (6) thesis/dissertation are comparable with the benefits in scholarships offered by DOST.

What made the RGSSP II scholarship program special was the academic support extended to the scholars. Before the start of the school year, new scholars particularly from the second batch were given a bridging course or tutorial of the prerequisites of the graduate courses they had to take. In addition, the scholarship steering committee assisted in requesting data sets that will be used by the scholars in their thesis or dissertations.

Weaknesses of the RGSSP II Scholarship Program

There were several issues encountered in the implementation of the RGSSP II scholarship program. When these issues are addressed, PSRTI is assured of the success of similar scholarship programs they will be implementing in the future.

- **Program Administration** The scholarship committees of the statistical agency had not thoroughly screened their applicants/nominees for the scholarship program. "I was identified by my boss to apply for the RGSSP II scholarship program.", recalled one scholar from the first batch.

Documents pertaining to the scholarship program had not been well documented. This would have allowed the easy monitoring of the performance of the scholars not just academically but also financially. When the need arises for information pertaining to the total financial support released to him, such information will be readily and accurately available.

Some statistical agencies from where the scholars came failed to release scholars from their duties and responsibilities in the agency during the duration of the scholarship, particularly during leave extensions. "The scholarship secretariat had been requested by some scholars to intercede on the scholars' behalf and request their nominating agencies to not require them to be part of ad hoc committees or activities which necessitate their presence and attention" (RGSSP II status report as of March 31,2005).

Responsibilities of scholars as stipulated in their service contracts had not been strictly enforced. In particular, scholars who failed to complete the scholarship requirements in the allotted time had not reimbursed within two years total financial support released to him with interest. The scholarship steering committee had to closely coordinate with the statistical agencies on this matter since some scholars had resigned from their nominating agencies without the scholar refunding any scholarship financial support released to him/her.

5. Recommendations

PSRTI, having been mandated to provide scholarships among others to build statistical manpower, should implement future scholarship programs that will cater the statistical needs of the PSS as well as the other government agencies such as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Agrarian Reform and Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Consequently, all programs (Master of Statistics, MS and PhD Statistics) should be made available to any applicant. Different marketing schemes should be employed to attract potential scholars from these agencies. Also, PSRTI should likewise consider offering scholarship grants to undergraduate students of statistics.

Because future scholars will be studying on a fulltime basis, heads of the different agencies must monitor scholarship application among its staff to ensure that the operations of the agencies will not be disrupted. Furthermore, screening of future applicants should be made more competitive knowing that the number of years the applicant have been working in the PSS and the nature of the work of the applicant are possible determinants of completion. Also, the screening committee should see to it that the applicant has no previous unfulfilled obligations as ruled by the Civil Service Commission when availing government scholarships.

PSRTI should continue the practice of providing bridging courses to successful applicants to prepare and ready them with the graduate courses that they will be enrolling.

Because there is no longer a need to coordinate among different statistical agencies, PSRTI must ensure a more efficient monitoring of the performance of future scholars. They must guarantee the strict implementation of the responsibilities of future scholars as stipulated in their service contracts.

Also, PSRTI should conduct evaluations of the scholarship program on a regular basis. This would ensure that problems encountered by the program will be addressed quickly.

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