

STATISTICAL TRAINING IN SUPPORT OF EVIDENCE BASED POLICY MAKING

Yoshiyuki Kobayashi

Statistical Research and Training Institute, Tokyo, Japan

y3.kobayashi@soumu.go.jp

Demand for official statistics is rapidly increasing and becoming more complex in Japan just as in many other countries. The government has been promoting application of Evidence Based Policy Making (EBPM) to improve efficiency and accountability in public policies. In view of promoting EBPM, statistical knowledge is required for staff in both statistical departments and policy departments. In response to the changing environment, the Statistical Research and Training Institute (SRTI) has begun to provide new statistical training and services to the central and local governments and the public. This paper describes recent efforts of SRTI regarding EBPM and other movements related to statistics, and discusses the challenges for SRTI.

INTRODUCTION

The government has long been providing official statistics as common public goods. For this purpose, the government has maintained the staff specialized in statistics, and encouraged them to improve their knowledge and skills. The Statistical Research and Training Institute (SRTI) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) has been playing core functions in developing statistical capacity in the government.

In the last few years, there has been a strong movement in the government to apply EBPM broadly to the formulation and evaluation of public policies. In parallel to this, interest in statistics among the public has been growing thanks to strong promotion of statistical education by educators and academia. In consequence, demand for official statistics is rapidly increasing in terms of quantity and quality. To meet such changes, SRTI has been stepping up its efforts in improving statistical capacity of the government by providing new training courses and technical support to statistical departments upon requests.

This paper describes recent efforts of SRTI regarding EBPM and other movements related to statistics, and discusses the challenges for SRTI. In the next two sections, summary description of SRTI and the changing environment of official statistics will be given. Then, the new measures taken by SRTI will be explained. Finally, challenges of SRTI will be discussed.

STATISTICAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING INSTITUTE

SRTI is the central statistical training institute of the Japanese government. Its mission is to contribute to the improvement of the government statistical system by conducting researches on statistical theories and methods and providing statistical training to civil service. SRTI closely collaborates with the Statistics Bureau of MIC and other statistical organizations in other ministries, and provides one of the core functions of the statistical system of the government.

Its foundation dates back to 1921 as the Institute for Statistical Training, and more than 30 thousand civil servants took courses at SRTI until now. Because of its historical background, the scope of function of SRTI had stronger emphasis on providing statistical training, but it has been gradually broadened to cover statistical researches and technical support for other organizations in the government.

Current main functions of SRTI are as follows:

- Conducting researches in statistical theories and methods
- Providing statistical training courses to civil servants in the central and local governments
- Providing technical support services to other departments at their requests

SRTI has been conducting researches on statistical theories and methods for application mainly in production and dissemination of official statistics. But now, the themes of researches are shifting toward statistical analysis for policy studies to meet the current needs.

The training courses of SRTI cover a broad range of themes from basic level to advanced level and from survey methods to data analysis. Participants used to be mainly those who work in statistical departments, but participation from non-statistical departments is increasing recently.

As a new function, SRTI has begun to provide technical advice and support to other departments and local governments at their request. Because of complexity of statistical issues that many departments face, it is difficult to accommodate all the training needs by classroom courses. Technical advice on case-by-case basis makes it possible to meet the needs of other departments more flexibly.

CHANGING ENVIRONMENT IN OFFICIAL STATISTICS

The environment of official statistics in Japan is rapidly changing in line with the emerging trend of wider use of EBPM. In 2016, the Basic Act on the Advancement of Public and Private Sector Data Utilization was enacted, and provided a new framework to utilize various types of data better for public policies. The Act promotes broader utilization of not only official statistics but also administrative data of the government and proprietary data (or so called “big data”) of the private sector to formulate and evaluate public policies more effectively.

Since its enactment, the act has been serving as a strong driver of EBPM, and concrete plans are being developed by the government. The Final Report of the Statistics Reform Promotion Conference proposes human resource development for promotion of EBPM. The Policy to Retain and Develop Personnel for EBPM (draft) emphasizes promotion of capacity development of statistical staff. The Master Plan Concerning the Development of Official Statistics (to be adopted by the Cabinet in March 2018) recommends that statistical training should be strengthened for those in both statistical departments and policy departments in view of promoting EBPM in the government. The Master Plan recommends SRTI to augment statistical training and support for other departments.

NEW MEASURES TAKEN BY SRTI

In this new context, statistical departments are required to step up their efforts to improve their statistics for use in EBPM, and for this purpose, staff development is an important element. Departments or other non-statistical departments need staff who have good knowledge and skills of data analysis. To meet such needs for human resource development, SRTI has begun to provide new statistical training courses focusing on policies and support services for improving existing statistics.

New courses focusing on policies.

In 2017, SRTI opened two new courses entitled “Statistics for Policy Formulation” and “Statistics for Policy Evaluation”. They have been developed by elaborating the former course of “Statistics for Policies”. Policy evaluation in central government started as performance measurement in 2001. SRTI opened a training course on application of statistical methods to performance measurement in 2001. That course has continued for 10 years, then SRTI opened “Statistics for Policies” in 2012.

“Statistics for Policy Formulation” presented an introductory lecture on policy formulation and gave a series of case studies of application of statistics to policy formulation of local governments. It consisted of following lectures: “Roles of Statistics in Policy Formulation”, “Use of Statistics in Local Policies”, “Use of Big Data by GIS in Local Policies”, “Demographic Statistics and Policy Measures to Low Fertility” and “Guide to Use of Official Statistics”. It was attended by 40 participants, comprising 8 from the central government and 32 from local governments. According to the opinion survey at the end of the course, 35 out of 40 participants expressed satisfaction in the course.

“Statistics for Policy Evaluation” consisted of the following lectures including exercises: “Use of Statistics in Policy Evaluation”, “Current Status and Challenges in Policy Evaluation”, “Planning, Processing and Analysis of Opinion Surveys”. It was attended by 39 participants, comprising 20 from the central government and 19 from local governments. According to the opinion survey at the end of the course, 34 out of 39 participants expressed satisfaction in the course.

As both courses are favorably rated by the participants, SRTI plans to continue them after reviewing and improving the contents according to the feedback from the participants.

Technical Support for Improving Existing Statistics

While it is efficient to provide training courses to groups of students, it is difficult to accommodate the needs of certain departments having specific issues to be resolved. To meet such needs, SRTI has begun to provide consultation service to review and improve existing statistics.

In 2017, the Statistics Commission identified the necessity of reviewing the accuracy of a regular sample survey conducted in conjunction with the Housing Start Statistics (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT)). Collaborating with MLIT, SRTI reviewed the sampling design of the survey, and developed a new sampling scheme. MLIT decided to adopt it, and is planning to implement it within a few years.

The immediate aim of the technical support is to resolve the problem, but this process was useful as a training opportunity, because the staff of the statistical department has opportunities to consult closely with the SRTI staff. Sampling theories and techniques can be taught in the classroom, but it is not always easy to put the learning into practice. There is a limit of capacity in providing of technical support for specific problems, but it will make a useful tool of staff development in statistics.

Disseminating statistical knowledge to the public

In response to the growing interest in statistics among the public, SRTI has made two introductory on-line courses open on the website. Although SRTI does not have a remit, it makes efforts to disseminate statistical knowledge to the public. Promoting better understanding of statistics among the public will strengthen the basis of official statistics, because support from the public is essential.

CONCLUSION AND CHALLENGES

Use of EBPM in the government of Japan is still in a very early stage, and approaches and methods are yet to be developed. This means that trial and error process is inevitably necessary for some period to accumulate experiences.

Under the circumstances, SRTI is making efforts to obtain good practices of EBPM that can be used as practical cases in training courses. For this purpose, close working relationship with other departments is being strengthened that needs technical advice and support.

Development of statistical training owes very much to the demand for statistical knowledge and skills in society. It is necessary to make sustained efforts to enhance awareness of importance of statistics in society at large.

REFERENCES

- EBPM Promotion Conference (2017). *The Policy to Retain and Develop Personnel for EBPM (draft)* (IN JAPANESE), <https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/it2/ebpm/kanjikai/dai2/siryou1.pdf> accessed 22 Feb. 2018.
- National Diet (2016). *The Basic Act on the Advancement of Public and Private Sector Data Utilization* (IN JAPANESE), http://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/search/elawsSearch/elaws_search/lsg0500/detail?lawId=428AC1000000103 accessed 22 Feb. 2018.
- Statistics Committee (2018). *The Master Plan Concerning the Development of Official Statistics* (In JAPANESE), http://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000523478.pdf accessed 22 Feb. 2018.
- Statistics Reform Promotion Conference (2017). *The Final Report of the Statistics Reform Promotion Conference* (IN JAPANESE), https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/toukeikaikaku/pdf/saishu_honbun.pdf#search=%27%E7%B5%B1%E8%A8%88%E6%94%B9%E9%9D%A9%E6%8E%A8%E9%80%B2%E4%BC%9A%E8%AD%B0%E6%9C%80%E7%B5%82%E5%8F%96%E3%82%8A%E3%81%BE%E3%81%A8%E3%82%81%27 accessed 22 Feb. 2018.