

MEETING THE STATISTICAL TRAINING NEEDS OF STATISTICAL OFFICES OF COUNTRIES IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE STATISTICAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER (SRTC) OF THE PHILIPPINES

Gervacio G. Selda, Jr.

Statistical Research and Training Center, Philippines

ggseldajr@srtc.gov.ph

Countries in Asia and Pacific increasingly adopt informal approaches to statistics education. One approach is conducting statistical trainings to upgrade the capability of national statistics offices. Training is resorted to because of cost and time constraints. The inherent advantages of this approach did not easily result to statistical training programs due to non-availability of local training providers. Most countries therefore rely on foreign training institutions to implement statistical capacity building programs. This paper examines how SRTC-Philippines responded to demands of other national statistics offices for statistical trainings despite some operational limitations. Accomplishments for the last five years will be examined, especially on pre- and post-evaluations and assessments of participating clients or statisticians from other countries. This will explain the difference of SRTC trainings when compared with similar institutions in other countries. To be discussed also are current strategies for effective and efficient delivery of training services to local and foreign clientele.

BACKGROUND

SRTC as the Research and Training Arm of the Philippine Statistical System (PSS)

The Philippine has a highly decentralized statistical system. It consists of all departments, bureaus, offices, agencies and instrumentalities of the national and local governments and government-owned and controlled corporations engaged in statistical activities either as a major function or as a necessary part of the administrative and regulatory functions. The PSS is also the government-wide system of providing statistical information and services to the public.

The Statistical Research and Training Center(SRTC) is one of the five (5) major statistical agencies operating in the PSS.¹ As a government agency in-charge of statistical research and training, the SRTC is responsible for: (a) developing a comprehensive and integrated research and training program on theories, concepts and methodologies for the promotion of the statistical system; (b) conducting non-degree training programs to upgrade the quality of statistical personnel and expand statistical manpower base in support of the needs of the statistical system; (c) undertaking research on statistical concepts, definitions and methods; (d) promoting collaborative efforts among members of the academic community, data producers and users; and (e) providing financial and other forms of assistance to enhance statistical research and training.

SRTC Mission

The overall mission of the SRTC is the improvement of the quality of statistical information generated by the PSS through conduct of high quality, objective and responsive statistical research and training activities. Through these activities, SRTC 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.

Resources of SRTC

SRTC has twenty-five (25) professional staff, six (6) of which are with the Training Division. The Training Division is the unit responsible for the development/updating and implementation of the non-degree training programs of the agency. In addition, SRTC has nine (9) research and information technology staff, nine (9) administrative and finance staff and one (1) support staff attached with the Office of the Executive Director of SRTC.

The SRTC relies mainly on government support to finance its activities. In general, the financial resources of SRTC principally come from three (3) sources, namely: (a) yearly appropriation received from the government; (b) income of its endowment fund²; and (c) collected training fees and research management fees. Considering the responsibility given to the SRTC as the focal agency for the conduct of statistical research and training in the country, the fund is not enough for the SRTC to make a big difference in the system.

STATISTICAL TRAINING PROGRAM OF SRTC

Statistical training refers to the design and conduct of non-formal statistical training programs intended to improve the capability of government statistical personnel in handling their statistical work. In the Philippines, it effectively complements efforts to improve the statistical services in government.

The training program of SRTC consists of: (a) regular training courses; and (b) specialized/ customized training courses. These two training courses are availed of by statistical personnel of other countries to meet their training needs. Under regular trainings, SRTC offers annual courses on data collection and processing, database management, data analysis and statistical modeling, statistical report writing, and statistical presentation/dissemination. These courses provide participants with practical, "hands-on" knowledge, skills and experience in various aspects of statistical work. Following is the list of regular training courses offered/conducted by the SRTC: (a) Descriptive Statistics; (b) Statistical Report Writing; (c) Database Management Using MS Access; (d) Processing and Analysis of Administrative Records; (e) Design and Operation of Socio-Economic Surveys; (f) Advanced Database Management Using MS Access; (g) Effective Use of MS Excel and PowerPoint for Statistical Reports; (h) Effective Statistical Presentation Techniques; (i) Statistical Projection and Forecasting Techniques; (j) Statistical Techniques for Socio-Economic Data Analysis; (k) Statistical Analysis Using STATA; (l) Statistics for Local Development Planning; (m) Econometric Modeling; (n) Sampling Design for Surveys; (o) Statistics for Policy Analysis; and (p) Statistical Methods for Research. The curriculum and materials of the courses are developed and updated from time to time by the SRTC training staff with assistance of resource persons. The training programs are listed in the calendar of courses made available in hard copy and in electronic format through the SRTC webpage. The statistical course offerings are updated every year based on feedback received from participants as well as consultations with statistical agencies and stakeholders. In 2009, a substantial number of participants to these trainings came from national statistics offices of countries like Sri Lanka and Oman.

In addition to the regular course offerings, the SRTC 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 one month. The contents of each program are individually designed to meet the specific needs and demands of clients. In close consultation with clients, the course contents are developed by resource persons and SRTC staff. The costing of each customized program depends largely on developing the training program including materials, program duration, food arrangements and other incidental expenses. Generally, SRTC can package training courses that will suit the requirements of the clients. It also prides itself of having the distinct advantage of tapping its pool of experts within the country due its linkages with other organizations in the conduct of research and training activities that are statistical and multidisciplinary in nature.

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 or international institutions. SRTC provided counterpart support to these trainings by way of making available its training facilities, lending its technical experts as resource persons for the trainings, providing the needed administrative support to run the training, and shouldering some of its costs.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE STATISTICAL TRAINING PROGRAM

There are many challenges that confront SRTC in implementing and expanding the reach of its non-degree training program. These are: (a) it has a very small unit in-charge of said activity; (b) its office is based only in Manila, the capital city of the country; (c) it has no in-house experts

to serve as resource persons in trainings; and (d) there is a growing demand for such training at the local and international levels. To address these problems, the SRTC has adopted several strategies. One of these 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. The linkages, has enabled SRTC to source the needed resource persons for various local and international training programs. Another approach, which is more applicable to local trainings, is the recruitment of higher education institutions, such as local universities and colleges operating in the regions, to serve as SRTC training affiliates in areas where it has no presence. The arrangement gives the chosen training affiliate the responsibility of determining the appropriate training program to be conducted locally, closely coordinate the conduct of pre- and post-training activities with SRTC, collect fees from the participants, recommend the appropriate resource person/s for the training, and utilize the collected fees to defray the cost of the training except the honoraria of resource person/s which SRTC provides, as it is mainly responsible for the selection of appropriate resource person/s for the training. SRTC also provides certificates to the successful participants of the training. To ensure the viability of this arrangement, the SRTC has made investments in the following areas: (a) training the point person in each training affiliate on proper coordination and management of a training program; (b) make an inventory of potential resource persons in the area and possible topics they can handle; (c) inventory of training materials and other related materials available at the SRTC that can be used in local trainings; and (d) conduct of training programs for the potential resource persons of future training courses. As of January 2010, the SRTC has a total of forty-seven (47) local universities and colleges as its training affiliates. In 2008 and 2009, there were 23 and 5 new member-colleges/universities, respectively. SRTC uses this approach 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.

Another scheme used by the SRTC in making its services available for the conduct of needed training programs for statisticians and related staff of other countries is by partnering with agencies of the United Nations such as 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, Japan International Cooperation Agency and others. Through these partnerships, SRTC is able to conduct many training programs for the statistical personnel and related staff of other countries. The beneficiaries of this partnership program are the national statistics offices of Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Sri Lanka, Royal Governments of Bhutan and Cambodia, Myanmar and many others. In general, the partnership with UN agencies and international agencies is very critical in strengthening the impact of the capacity building program of the SRTC.

Advertising through its website is another approach used by SRTC to market its training services and programs. Through this IT-enabled approach, the agency is able to disseminate information on its regular training courses to statistical agencies of other countries in Asia and the Pacific region. In 2008-2009, most of the foreign participants who attended the regular training courses averred that they came to know of SRTC course offerings from their browsing of its website: <http://www.srtc.gov.ph>.

STATISTICAL TRAININGS CONDUCTED FOR 2005 - 2009

For the last five (5) years, SRTC conducted a total of 228 training courses, where 192 are customized/specialized training courses and 36 are regular courses. The number of participants that benefited from these training courses totaled to 5,238 with 4,969 local participants and 269 foreign participants. Of the 228 training courses conducted during the 5-year period, 21 were for foreign statisticians while the rest (207) were for local statistical personnel. In 2009, the SRTC conducted an unprecedented eighty-six (86) training courses, categorized as follows: (a) 15 under its regular training program with 18 statistical personnel from Sri Lanka and 1 from Oman as among those who participated; (b) 13 customized training courses which benefited 162 statisticians and related staff of other countries and held in partnership with various foreign institutions like the UNICEF-DPRK, Royal Government of Bhutan, UN Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific and JICA;

(c) 14 customized training courses for the staff of various government agencies; (d) 17 trainings on CBMS modules for the MDG project with UNDP; (e) 11 trainings subsidized by SRTC for selected agencies in the PSS and conducted in partnership with the SRTC's regional affiliates; and (f) 16 other courses undertaken as part of its research projects. A total of two thousand eighty-nine (2,089) participants benefited from the training courses that promoted statistical capacity building and heightened awareness on the significance of statistics in various endeavors. The number of trainings conducted marked a big increase of 65% in comparison to the previous year with 52 training courses and almost tripling the number of trainings targeted for the year, which were 35. The training courses conducted covered 2,493 training hours.

In the same year, the SRTC was made a partner by JICA in assisting some of the ASEAN countries in improving their statistical capacities under the south-south cooperation program. Through this program, the SRTC has conducted several statistical trainings aimed at enhancing the capacity of the technical staff of the Ministry of Economy and Finance in providing policy inputs for decision making of the Royal Government of Cambodia. The whole training program is designed to be implemented in two years beginning 2009. For 2010, JICA also contracted SRTC to be its partner in helping the Department of Planning of the Myanmar Government improve its system of national accounts through a 3-year training program. These engagements have given SRTC a major responsibility of providing statistical capacity building services to many countries in the Asia and the Pacific region.

EVALUATIONS OF SRTC TRAININGS

Based on the results of evaluations of training programs or courses conducted for the statistical personnel of other countries, the SRTC, in general, was able to meet the expectations of its foreign clients in terms of training contents, materials, facilities and administration of the courses. Reaction level evaluations also showed that resource persons assigned by SRTC to handle the trainings were found to be effective in delivering the assigned topics. Similarly, results of workshops and exercises done in groups or individually revealed that participants learned a lot from the training programs or courses. Pre-tests and post-tests were likewise administered to measure the extent of knowledge acquired by participants in the courses. Results showed that positive gains were made by participants in completing the training programs or courses. On the other hand, no job behavior level and organizational level evaluations were undertaken given that most indicators that can be used at these levels are more qualitative than quantitative in nature. Moreover, evaluation at these levels requires greater budgetary allocation/resources. This is one main reason why SRTC until now has not conducted evaluation at job behavior and organizational levels for trainings conducted to foreign clients.

Findings of the evaluations also revealed that most participants and sponsoring institutions prefer to have the trainings conducted in the Philippines. Some of the reasons cited were: (a) cheaper to conduct in the Philippines; (b) availability of knowledgeable and competent resource persons and adequate facilities for training; (c) Filipinos 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.

CONCLUSION

While there is evidence that the overall statistical capability is improving in the Asia and the Pacific region, many developing countries are still unable to compile a minimum set of basic statistics. Relevant and reliable statistics are a fundamental requirement for the development of evidence-based policies and their implementation³. Here, SRTC is hopeful that thru training, it will be able to contribute in putting the statistical systems of these priority countries at par with the rest. To achieve this program, SRTC should strengthen its networking and partnership with institutions like UN and JICA so that needed statistical services can be made available to these countries. Given the favorable feedback on the many training programs it handled, SRTC is in very enviable position to assist the developing countries in the region face the challenges of development.

NOTES

- 1 The other four (4) major statistical agencies in the Philippine Statistical System are: (a) National Statistical Coordination Board—the policy and coordinating body on all statistical matters; (b) National Statistics Office—the primary data gathering agency for general purpose statistics; (c) Bureau of Agricultural Statistics—the agency in-charge of collecting and maintaining the agricultural and fishery statistics; and (d) Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics—the agency in-charge of collecting and maintaining the labor and employment statistics.
- 2 This is a special fund created for the purpose of providing additional funds for the conduct of statistical research and training. Only the income of this fund can be utilized for such purpose.
- 3 An assessment cited in the 2010-2014 strategic plan of SIAP.

REFERENCES

- Selda, Jr. Gervacio G. (2007). The Philippine Statistical System and SRTC. *Third Workshop on Forging Partnership in Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific*, 20-21 November 2007, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Strategic Plan of the Institute for the Academic Year 2010-2014. *Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific*, SIAP Governing Council 4th Session, 11-12 November 2008, Chiba, Japan.
- Philippine Executive Order No. 121. *Reorganizing and Strengthening the Philippine Statistical System and for Other Purposes*. 30 January 1987, Manila, Philippines.