

A New Framework for Development of Japanese Official Statistics

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1. Overview

The Statistics Act of Japan was thoroughly revised for the first time in 60 years, and the new Act has been fully enforced since April 1, 2009. This Act provides the establishment of a five-year Master Plan Concerning the Development of Official Statistics (hereafter referred to as the “Master Plan”) which is decided through consensus of all the ministers (Cabinet decision).

A new scheme of the Master Plan is effective for the development of new statistics which meet social and economic demands, and for the promotion of efforts to improve usability of statistics by integrating surveys conducted by several government organizations. In addition, regarding the progress of the Master Plan, “follow-up scheme” is provided by the Statistics Act. “Follow-up scheme” means that the Statistics Commission (a specialized third-party advisory body) evaluates the progress of the Master Plan and gives advice to each statistical organization in the government, if needed.

In this way, under the Master Plan, the mechanism is constructed so that the development of Japanese official statistics is promoted as the whole government and the Statistics Commission evaluates the progress. This mechanism is a kind of PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle, and we may call it “A New Framework for Development of Japanese Official Statistics”.

2. Statistics Act, the Master Plan and “Follow-up scheme”

2.1 Statistics Act

Recognizing that official statistics are critical information not only for administrative organizations but also for the citizens and businesses in their reasonable decision making, the purposes of the Statistics Act are to promote systematic and efficient development of official statistics and to ensure the usefulness thereof through providing fundamental rules concerning the production and provision of official statistics, and thereby to contribute to the sound development of the national economy and enhancement of the living standards of the citizens.

In addition, the Statistics Act includes principles concerning quality of official statistics. Specifically, as fundamental principles of the Act, this is provided as follows.

(Fundamental Principles)

Article 3

(1) Official statistics shall be developed systematically through mutual cooperation and the appropriate

- sharing of roles among administrative organs, etc.
- (2) Official statistics shall be produced with appropriate and reasonable methodologies, so as to ensure neutrality and reliability.
 - (3) Official statistics shall be provided widely for the citizens so that they are easily accessible for effective use.
 - (4) Confidential information concerning individuals or juridical persons, or other organizations collected for producing official statistics shall be protected.

These principles are made fully compatible with the “Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics” adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1994 with a view to make the statistical system meet international standards as far as possible.

In order to realize the above-mentioned purposes and fundamental principles, the Statistics Act makes provisions concerning the coordination scheme of statistical surveys in the decentralized statistical system, the development of the Master Plan, the production of official statistics, appropriate management and confidentiality protection of individual records, promotion of effective use of statistical data, and the follow-up scheme by the Statistics Commission to evaluate the progress of the Master Plan.

2.2 The Master Plan

Background

In the statistical system of Japan, the Statistics Bureau plays the role of the central statistical organization, and the other relevant government organizations produce the statistics necessary for execution of their jurisdiction. This decentralized statistical system has the advantage that administration-based statistics are timely produced, while it also has a possibility that statistical surveys overlap, and statistics in need are not produced as the whole government. Therefore, the coordination for systematic developing statistics is required.

To eliminate duplication of statistical surveys, fundamental statistics have been designated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (hereafter referred to as the MIC) since the former Statistics Act, and the scheme of scrutiny and approval of statistical surveys by the MIC was in place. This scheme was effective in eliminating duplication of statistics, but didn't work very well for filling the gap of statistics and achieving stronger coordination among government organizations. For example, the absence of statistics concerning service industry had been pointed out by the commission consisting of academic experts.

Planning of the Master Plan

The Statistics Act, thoroughly revised in 2007, provides that a five-year Master Plan Concerning the Development of Official Statistics be established by a Cabinet decision on the basis of the consensus of all the ministers. The Act provides that the MIC develop the planning of the Master Plan. That is, in this process, the MIC is given an authority to coordinate the development of official statistics, and can work more effectively to construct the scheme of systematic developing of official statistics without omission and duplication. The new statistical development scheme of the Master Plan is effective for the promotion of usability of statistics by unifying concepts and definitions among several government organizations, as well as the development of new statistics which meet social and economic demands.

Specific examples of the Master Plan and the Progress

In Japan, statistics in some fields such as environment and tourism have been considered to be insufficient or delayed. The Master Plan includes some measures to enrich these fields specifically so that the

government organizations in charge can work on their development more effectively. So far, it has been steadily promoted. Regarding surveys collecting the data on monthly manufacturing production (production dynamics survey), which are now implemented separately by each of four government organizations in charge of respective industrial sectors, the Master Plan gives measures to develop comprehensive statistics by unifying the survey items, terminology and definitions across the organizations. Now, with the four government organizations working together, the measures has been steadily implemented.

2.3 “Follow-up scheme”

The Statistics Act provides that the MIC put together the enforcement status of the Act including the implementation of the Master Plan, and report to the Statistics Commission so that the Commission can evaluate the progress and give advice to each statistical organization if needed. Based on this scheme, in June 2009, the Commission advised the Cabinet Office to improve the System of National Accounts (SNA), and also recommended the MIC to continue and strengthen the efforts to establish the business register. Further efforts of the government organizations to respond to the advice and recommendations will result in the next step of the improved Master Plan.

3. Conclusion

As shown above, under the Statistic Act, the five-year Master Plan and “follow-up scheme” are provided. The scheme provides a cycle consisting of (1) the planning of the Master Plan, (2) efforts by the whole government, (3) evaluation by the Statistics Commission. This new framework is expected to contribute to the development of the Japanese statistical system.

From now on, we will accomplish the goals set in the Master Plan as the whole government by 2014, and we hope to contribute to the development of official statistics from both national and international perspectives.

REFERENCES (RÉFÉRENCES)

The Master Plan Concerning the Development of Official Statistics (Cabinet Decision, 2009).
<http://www.stat.go.jp/english/index.htm>