Enhancing the communication of statistics for better understanding of economic and financial conditions

Yeah, Kim Leng
Group Chief Economist
yeah@ram.com.my

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Presentation outline

1. Key principles of official statistics and effective communication
2. Perception survey of expert user group
3. Suggestions for enhancing communication effectiveness
4. Summary and conclusion
I. Key principles of official statistics and effective communication

Core principles of official statistical system

- Relevance, impartiality & access
- Professional standards & integrity
- Accountability & transparency
- Prevention of abuse
- Trusted sources
- Confidentiality
- Legislation
- National coordination
- Use of international standards
- International cooperation

Foundation of effective communications
I. Key principles of official statistics and effective communication

Core principles of effective communication

- Meet needs of general public for statistics on social, economic and general conditions
- Show importance of statistics to economic and business planning and monitoring
- Generate public awareness and support for statistical programmes
- Timely dissemination & clear communication
- Transparent, impartial & independent
- Accurate and reliable
- Methodological soundness
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II. Perception survey of expert user group

Key areas of expert users’ perception survey

Purposeful survey of selected expert user group comprising economists, market analysts and researchers; 14 responses received out of 15 canvassed.

- Foundation: Legal & institutional framework
- Organization: Integrity assurance, Methodological soundness
- Service: Accuracy & reliability, Serviceability, Accessibility
II. Perception survey of expert user group

1. Foundation

Broad consensus among both local and foreign users in the selected expert user group that the legal and institutional foundation is well established and resources are adequate.

Figure 1.1. There is a well established legal and institutional foundation for collecting and publishing official socio-economic and financial statistics in Malaysia.

Figure 1.2. There are adequate resources for DOS and other government ministries and agencies to conduct surveys and disseminate social and economic statistics.
Respondents expressed stronger relevance of BNM statistics to their work given the importance of monetary and financial conditions to this user group.

Figure 1.3. The social and economic statistics and information collected and published by DOS and other ministries are relevant and useful to my line of work.

Figure 1.4. The financial statistics collected and published by BNM are relevant and useful to my line of work.
II. Perception survey of expert user group

2. Integrity assurance

The question on data transparency and professionalism elicited more mixed responses especially among the foreign users who are less sanguine on transparency and standard of collection and dissemination.

Figure 2.1. There is a high degree of professionalism in DOS and other government agencies such as BNM in compiling and publishing official statistics.

Figure 2.2. The statistical survey methods and procedures employed by Department of Statistics are transparent.
3. Methodological soundness and coverage

More foreign users view the subscription to international standards and best practices by the country’s statistical agencies less favorably compared to local users. Both categories however are equally split in the adequacy of data coverage.

Figure 3.1. International standards and best practices are applied in the collection, processing and dissemination of data.

Figure 3.2. The scope of data covered is adequate for each area (e.g., demographics, national accounts, trade, labor).
4. Accuracy and reliability

Though a majority of users view the data sources to be reliable, a sizeable number of respondents, particularly the foreign users, disagree. The high number of respondents who do not know if statistical techniques are used in surveys point to the need for greater dissemination of information on survey methods.

II. Perception survey of expert user group

Figure 4.1. The sources of data collected by the Department of Statistics and other agencies are reliable.

Figure 4.2. Statistical techniques are used in surveys and data collection methods.
A high proportion of users in the sample do not think that the published statistics are updated regularly and on time although a majority of the respondents (80%) agree that the official statistics in the country are generally coherent and structured. A high number of respondents, especially among the foreign users, expressed the view that policies and practices on revisions of surveys are not clearly explained.

Figure 5.1. The published statistics are updated regularly and in a timely manner.

Figure 5.2. The statistics published by the Department of Statistics and other government agencies are generally coherent and structured.
II. Perception survey of expert user group

6. Accessibility

The perception on data accessibility is split with 64 percent agreeing that there is easy access and the rest disagree. Half of the respondents do not agree that the metadata is readily accessible. Likewise, there is a high number of respondents who perceive inadequate assistance provided by the national statistical agency.

Figure 6.1. There is easy access to official statistics in Malaysia.

Figure 6.2. Information (metadata) describing the data series are available or accessible by users.
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III. Suggestions for enhancing communication effectiveness
Thrust 1: Meeting expert users’ needs and expectations

Given its function in monitoring economic performance and providing economic forecasts and market analysis, the main user group (economists, market analysts and researchers) plays an integral role in enhancing society’s understanding of economic and financial conditions.

- Credibility
- Quality
- Timeliness
- Service standard

Service quality and adequacy

- Explanations for revisions
- Online databases
- Archived time series

Specific requests

Expert users’ communication of analyses and views on economic and financial conditions to the general public
III. Suggestions for enhancing communication effectiveness

Thrust 2: Deepening media engagement

While there is continuing coverage by the mass media on economic and financial statistics, a broader and deeper engagement with the media, specifically the economic or business journalists and reporters, is one of the most effective and indispensable means of informing the general public, stimulating wider discussion and raising the level of public understanding of economic and financial conditions.

- PR officer
- Media help desk
- Seminars & workshops
- Training

- Quick response to errors or misinterpretation
- Widen use of internet-based communication tools

Fostering a good working relationship with the media
III. Suggestions for enhancing communication effectiveness

Thrust 3: Improving clarity and comprehensiveness of statistical reports

Ensure clarity in the presentation of statistics and explanations. While statistical agencies tend to adopt the positive approach to reporting, avoiding value judgment especially on government policies, they could nonetheless inject their interpretation if these are helpful for non-expert users to understand what is significant (explanatory comments) and why (analytical comments).

- **Clarity and comprehensiveness of statistical reports**
  - Simple but precise language
  - Coherent
  - Clear explanations for revisions

- **Highlight key statistics**
  - Use of summary or demonstration tables
  - Replace reference tables with interactive databases

Timely, clear and comprehensive statistical reports, media releases and analysts' briefings.
With the economy rapidly changing and transforming, statisticians in the public sector are confronted with the challenge of maintaining reconcilability of data with the past while expanding coverage to meet current and future needs. Communicating these changes via seminars, workshops and focus group meetings have become an important part of a well functioning and effective national statistical system.
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IV. Summary and conclusion

Concluding observations

Effective dissemination and communication of official statistics play a crucial role in a country’s development process.

The results of an expert user group perception survey reveal that there is a significant scope to further strengthen the quality, timeliness and adequacy of economics and financial statistics in the country.

Ensuring trusted sources of data and developing the integrity, credibility and independence (that is, free from political or market influence) of the producing institutions are the cornerstones of effective communication.

Four thrusts have been identified to focus efforts on enhancing the communication of statistics

- meeting the needs and expectations of the expert users;
- engaging the media more extensively to broaden coverage, respond swiftly to erroneous reports or misinterpretation and raise the level of general public’s grasp of economic and financial issues;
- improve clarity and comprehensiveness in media releases and statistical publications, and
- strengthening capabilities and interactions through user group training workshops, seminars and feedback sessions.
Thank you