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FOREWORD BY THE CHIEF EDITOR

The government relies on official statistics as input for policy formulation and implementation. However, the expected adherence to principles of objectivity, transparency and integrity by the national statistical system also makes official statistics an important basis for others to evaluate government performance.

The dual role encompasses the whole range of subject matter areas of official statistics and some of the pertinent issues are highlighted in the present issue of the journal.

In the first article, it is noted that although small and medium enterprises (SMEs) potentially constitute a major source of economic growth, there is a need to assess their actual contribution to the relevant sectors viz manufacturing, services and agriculture. The findings are based on information canvassed through the Baseline Census of SMEs 2005 conducted by the Department of Statistics, Malaysia (DOSM).

Acknowledging the inadequacy of annual GDP estimates, the second article emphasises the importance of the quarterly GDP as a timely and comprehensive indicator for assessing, analysing and monitoring the country's economic development. The need is more acute in decision-making to address a crisis situation, as experienced during the previous financial crisis. The article presents the challenges encountered and the strategies adopted in meeting the timeliness and acceptability expectations of the stakeholder agencies as well as the wider user community.

Considering that moving holidays can seriously affect time series data, it is important that such movements be taken into account so as to avoid misleading interpretations of the resulting estimates. Hence, in the third article, the authors propose a seasonal adjustment procedure called SEAM (Seasonal Adjustment for Malaysia) to remove moving holiday effects from the Malaysian economic data series.

As a large scale data collection operation, a population and housing census involves various tasks, each of which has to be carefully studied in preparation for the next census. The fourth article reviews the enumeration strategies adopted and the topics included in the previous censuses.

The fifth article investigates the quality of age data collected in the 1991 and 2000 population and housing censuses in Malaysia and examines the issue of age misstatement with respect to preference and avoidance of specific terminal digits.

This issued also contains abstracts of the papers presented during the National Statistics Conference, 2006, which was held from 4th to 5th of September 2006, with the theme *Statistics for National Development*. What transpired from the interaction between producers and users of official statistics is a realisation of the need for statistical science and hence statisticians to strive for greater impact on the way government policies are formulated and their implementation monitored.

Elsewhere, international forums are chanting the mantra: **Better Use of Better Statistics for Better Policies and Better Development Outcomes**. Hence, those responsible for official statistics are also mutually accountable for the final development results.

While the call is universal, changes to facilitate its realisation in the local environment are inevitable. It is imperative to step up both the demand and supply of official statistics. Boosting demand requires expanding the pool of users who appreciate statistics and are confident of the quality of official statistics.

On the supply side, delivery of statistical products and services could be improved if the national statistical development strategy, including its capacity building program, is explicitly integrated into the national development plan.

However, the proposed integration and broader responsibility should not be allowed to compromise the dual role of official statistics. Although independence of the official statistical system is fundamental to open government and democracy, institutional autonomy is currently the privilege of only a few leading national statistical organisations.

AZIZ @ FIKRY MOHAMMAD

Chief Editor

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