The Master Plan for Official Statistics

and the PDCA Cycle in Japan

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Abstract

In Japan, we have established the “Master Plan concerning the Development of Official Statistics” prescribed by the Statistics Act. This plan is a Cabinet decision, which is an important point for countries with a de-centralized statistics system. The Master Plan contains issues regarding, for example, the development of official statistics in various fields, capacity development, the quality-assurance framework, and the PDCA cycle of the plan itself. The plan also specifies relevant agencies and a timetable for each item to be implemented.

We make a report on the implementation of the plan every year. The advisory committee reviews the report and makes recommendations, according to which progress will be made. Thus, the PDCA cycle is effective in the development of official statistics.

The Master Plan is a five-year plan, and the first plan (April 2009–March 2014) has just finished. The second Master Plan (April 2014–March 2019) started recently and contains some new topics, for example, on open data and study of big data.

**1. Overview of the Japanese Statistical System**

The Japanese statistical system is decentralized.[1] There are 10 primary ministries producing statistics (see Annex). The ministries produce and disseminate statistics for their own policy purposes.

Under such circumstances, the Statistics Act (Act No. 53 of 2007)[2] and other legislations provide the Director-General for Statistical Standards with a strong role of coordinating statistical activities in the government, including the following:

(1) Planning and promotion of basic statistical matters

(2) Examination and coordination of statistical surveys

(3) Establishment and revision of statistical standards

(4) Coordination of international statistical activities

The Statistics Commission acts as an advisory committee. The Director-General for Statistical Standards consults with the Commission upon the approval of statistical surveys and the Master Plan for Official Statistics (discussed below), etc. The Commission consists of thirteen members (statisticians, economists, sociologists, jurists, etc.).

**2. Master Plan concerning the Development of Official Statistics**

*2.1 New Statistics Act and the Master Plan*

In 2007, the Statistics Act in Japan was fully revised for the first time in 60 years, in order to respond to various socio-economic changes (Act No. 53 of 2007). The pillars of the new Statistics Act are as follows:

1. Establishment of the Master Plan concerning the Development of Official Statistics
2. Foundation of the Statistics Commission
3. Promotion of use of statistical data
4. Enhancement of confidentiality protection
5. Promotion of use of administrative record information

Among these five pillars, “(1) Establishment of the Master Plan concerning the Development of Official Statistics” is crucial under the decentralized statistical system in Japan.

The Master Plan shall contain the following matters:

* Basic policies for development of official statistics
* Measures to be implemented in order to develop official statistics
* Management of the progress

For each measure in the Master Plan, the ministries in charge and the timeline is specified.

The Master Plan is a Cabinet Decision, i.e., the consensus of all ministries.

The Master Plan is revised approximately every five years. The first-term Master Plan was decided in March 2009 and covered from April 2009 to March 2014 (FY2009–FY2013, as the fiscal year in Japan starts in April and ends in March the following year). The second-term Master Plan was decided in March 2014 as a revision of the first-term one, and covers FY2014–FY2018.

*2.2 Master Plan and PDCA Cycle*

The Master Plan is drafted by the Director-General for Statistical Standards, who consults with the Statistics Commission (attended by relevant ministries, the central bank, and representatives of local governments as observers), and public comments are required.

Once the Master Plan is decided, each ministry is responsible for the implementation.

The government reports the situation of implementation of the master Plan annually, and the report is reviewed by the Statistics Commission. The Commission makes recommendations (if necessary) to relevant ministries, and the ministries in charge respond.

The PDCA cycle works in such way.

**3. Overview of the first-term Master Plan and its Evaluation**

The first-term Master Plan (FY2009–FY2013)[3] was decided in March 2009, and as was mentioned before, the progress of the Plan was monitored annually.

Main topics covered in the first-term Master Plan were:

* Development of National Accounts, strengthening collaboration with basic statistics
* Construction and utilization of Business Register
* Development of statistics on welfare and social security, aiming at improvement of international comparability in the statistics of social security
* Development of social statistics, in response to the aging society and work-life balance
* Utilization of administrative records
* Promotion of quality-assurance

Based on the annual review, the Statistics Commission made recommendations, for example,

* to strengthen the development of National Accounts
* to strengthen the development of the Business Register

After FY2012, the Statistics Commission conducted a detailed review, as a part of preparations for the new (second-term) Master Plan.

Of 196 items specified in the first-term master Plan,

99 items were finished by the end of FY2012,

59 items are in the process of implementation.

Based on the review, the Director-General for Statistical Standards drafted the second-term Master Plan, and after consultation with the Statistics Commission and the receiving of public comments, the plan was decided (as a Cabinet Decision) in March 2014.

**4. Overview of the second-term Master Plan**

The second-term Master Plan[4] covers from April 2014 to March 2019 (FY2014–FY2018 in Japan) and contains the following topics:

* Development of National Accounts, corresponding to 2008SNA
* Development of economic statistics, with the Economic Census as the axis
* Development of labour-related statistics, corresponding to ICLS resolutions
* Re-examination of classifications of workers for further appropriate comprehension of “non-regular” employment
* Promotion of on-line (using internet) surveys
* Study on the use of new data (big data, Personal Identification Numbers, etc.)
* Further promotion of quality-assurance
* Promotion of the open-data policy
* Promotion of international cooperation, including support for UN-SIAP (United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific)

As in the first-term Plan, concrete measures (107 items in total), ministries in charge, and the timelines are specified.

The government, as a whole, will proceed in line with the Plan, and the PDCA cycle works.

**5. Quality Assurance Framework**

Quality assurance framework is also built in the PDCA cycle.

When a ministry intends to conduct a statistical survey, it has to submit the plan of the survey to the Office of Director-General for Statistical Standards. The Office examines the plan and approves it, when appropriate.

In the course of the examination, the Office checks issues including the methodological soundness, cost-effectiveness, soundness of implementation, respondent burden, etc., which are also included in NQAF.

After the approval, ministries conduct the statistical surveys and make self-assessment of the quality of the statistics. The result of the self-assessment will be utilized in the next approval process.

**6. Concluding remarks**

Under the de-centralized statistical system, as in Japan, a powerful coordination/leading mechanism is necessary for the development of statistics. The “Master Plan concerning the Development of Official Statistics” is an example of such mechanism.

It involves relevant ministries and consultation with various stakeholders, and the PDCA cycle is built-in.

The quality assurance framework would be a powerful tool for the implementation and the review of the progress of the Plan.

**References**

[1] Outline of Japanese Official Statistics, <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/index/outline/contents.htm>

[2] Statistics Act (Act No. 53 in 2007), <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/index/seido/1-1n.htm>

[3] Master Plan Concerning the Development of Official Statistics (March 13, 2009, Cabinet decision), <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/index/seido/pdf/2009mp.pdf>

[4] Master Plan Concerning the Development of Official Statistics (March 25, 2014, Cabinet decision), English translation under preparation

[5] UN-SIAP (United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific), <http://www.unsiap.or.jp/>

**Annex Organization of the Japanese Statistical System**

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