

Community Level Statistics for Monitoring System in Thailand

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Abstract

This paper presents the community-level statistics project undertaken by the Thai National Statistical Office and Provincial Statistical Offices in collaboration of the Tambon Administrative Organization. The project aims to collect accurate socio-economic data with a view of utilizing the data to effectively implement the 'sufficiency economy' or the 'new theory' conceived, advocated and promoted by His Majesty, the King of Thailand.

Background

Under the Thai decentralized statistical system, there are various statistical units under different Ministries, Departments and State Enterprises that also produce statistics for their own work. To avoid statistical work duplication and to ensure that other government agencies produce high quality statistical data, the Thai National Statistical Office (TNSO) provides statistical coordination, advice, training and consultancy services on statistical techniques, data processing and computerized data computing systems.

The TNSO is mainly responsible for producing statistical data on basic statistics to indicate the socio-economic situation of the

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country. These data are required for setting the national development plans comprising government policy. As such, it may be said that the TNSO is the core producer of data. At the same time, the TNSO measures, monitors and evaluates the success of the major policies of the government.

Its vision apart from being the core data producer is to be the main organization that manages the statistical issues of the country and serves as the center for standardized statistics, able to support and enhance the country's statistical administration efficiently.

Thailand's decentralized governance setup

Thailand is divided into 75 provinces (Changwad) that are administered by appointed provincial governors (PGs). Geographically speaking, these Provinces are grouped into 4 regions, i.e., 25 Provinces in the Central Region, 17 in the Northern Region, 19 in the Northeastern and 14 provinces in the Southern Region. Each province is divided into 2 areas, namely: municipal areas and non-municipal areas (or urban and rural areas). Each area, in turn, is divided into district (Amphoe) and sub-district (Tambon). At present, there are 876 Amphoe and 7,258 Tambon for the whole country. The capital of Thailand is Bangkok consisting of 50 districts (Amphoe). For the rural areas, each Tambon consists of villages (Moo Ban) which are governed by Headmen, numbering 67,373.

Based on this setup, the TNSO has 75 provincial statistical offices (PSO) throughout the country to enhance the capacity to compile data and the skill to operate systematically. At the same time, there are also, the provincial information centres (PIC). The Provincial Governor (PG) has government policy both at national and commune levels. Without information from the various areas, the PG cannot be expected to administer the policy fruitfully. Among the strategies in the National Plan of the government, the policy on poverty alleviation is given the foremost priority both at national and commune levels. The other policies include human development and quality society,

balancing the economic structure, administering natural resource and environment, among others. Thus, the roles of the PICs are crucial.

A recent and one of the most important policies of the government is the one based on the philosophy of “sufficiency economy” which was conceived, advocated and promoted by His Majesty the King of Thailand. Widely known as the “New Theory”, it aims to improve the quality of life of the Thais, in particular, those in the rural areas where most of the country’s population are found. Focusing on farmers with 15 *rais* (6 acres) of land, this agriculture model aims to provide sufficient water to farms throughout the year, enough to feed the members in the household. With the possibility of increasing the household income, this improvement in their lives will lead to an improvement in the national economy.

However, before undertaking this model, collection of data and accurate information from various fields, including environment condition, is essential.

Community level statistics project

Realizing the importance of information as the basis for any policy decision and long-term risk mitigation strategy, the PG of the Phetchaburi Province collaborated with various agencies in the province including the Tambon Administration Organization (TAO), and the PSO of Phetchaburi Province to carry out the project on community level statistics. With the experience from the pilot project in the past and the consideration for the quality of data, the schedule of questionnaires has been recast as follows:

Form 1: for information from one person which can be used to sum and represent the information of all the members in the household and thus be the information of the household level;

Form 2: for information of household which can sum up the information for all the households in the village and serve as the information of that village; and

Form 3: for information at the village level.

Inquiries in the schedule

Per the requirement of the Phetchaburi Province on the need for both basic data and additional indicators, the previous schedule of questionnaire used in the pilot project was reviewed and reassessed.

To be able to have a better measure of the situation and well-being of the people in the village/commune, the information in the schedule were grouped into 13 fields: (1) population and housing; (2) labor force; (3) education/religion/culture; (4) health; (5) social welfare; (6) income and expenditure; (7) agriculture/forestry/fishery; (8) industry establishment; (9) wholesale/retail; (10) transportation; (11) communication; (12) tourism; and (13) natural resource/environment

Recruitment and training

Volunteer officers of the villages with a minimum of vocational education were recruited. Training of all these officers, who work as enumerators, was in the plan. Understanding of all the inquiries in the schedule cannot be expected and so before the time of field work, one whole day was set aside for all the 180 recruits to get acquainted with the nature of their work.

Workload

Approximately about 451,000 people in 145,000 households are in Phetchaburi Province. The province consists of 8 Amphoe, 93 Tambon and 598 villages in the rural areas. All 598 villages were included, with a population of 300,000 in 88,000 households. On the average, one enumerator has to interview, using all the 3 forms, 3–4 villages. The officers in the PSO (16 officers) together with 93 other supervisors from TAO helped the enumerators in solving the problems in the field.

Quality of the data

For every 10 villages, the supervisors had to get one village at random for checking the answer in Form 3 as a precautionary measure. At

the same time, about 10 sample households in that village were selected systematically for inspection of Forms 2 and 1. Thus, the samples for 60 villages with 600 households were verified in the field. Other parts of the process were also included for inspection.

Data processing

After the data were collected, the next stage was the manual editing, keying in of the data and machine editing to be finished before October 2005. Since it was an urgent requirement of the PIC, the PSO had to process and finished the tasks on time.

Benefit

Apart from collecting the data in rural areas, the PSO of Phetchaburi Province also conducted a survey in urban areas by using the area frame of NS–Enumeration District (ED) and Block (BLK)–to identify the boundary of the area. It can be said that one BLK is one village. The officers of the PSO are in charge of these areas. So, after finishing the final data processing, all the data from both rural and urban areas can represent the whole information of the Province. The TAO and other agencies can also make use of these data. All the problems and difficulties were managed easily because the relevant information had been collected.

Since all the 75 provinces have to create the PIC, standardization and comparison among provinces could be made with the use of all the 3 forms. Each province can make use of it and add inquiries for meeting the particular requirement of that province.

Problems identified

Because of insufficient time and limited manpower, the following problems were noted:

1. It takes time to get data from the members in the household. This project is just like conducting a census.
2. Insufficiently trained enumerators would take 2 days, instead of 1 day, to finish the task.

3. Most of the enumerators have little experience in this area of work.
4. Since the officers in PSO have their own work, supervisors with bachelor degree should be recruited.
5. The weather condition in April is not suitable for field work.

Future plan

Since the NSO and PSO in Thailand are mainly responsible for producing the data, it is expected that the PSO officers will do their best to learn more about the indicators and how to analyze the data. Thus, the PG can implement the policy and assess any possible damage and natural hazards. It is well-known that knowledge and reliable information are the basis for any policy decision and long term risk mitigation strategy. Thus, it is better to give a chance for the TAO to handle the processing of the whole project while the PSO supervises and provides technical assistance.

Comments

- The project is ambitious and comprehensive and a very tough job to effectively carry out, given the demands on time and manpower. When carrying the project design further, careful thinking about what CBMS can add to the existing data and about who will ultimately be using the data should be done. There is reason for concern regarding the timeframe required to collect such a wide range of data and a re-evaluation of the proposed timeframe might be necessary.
- The data on basic needs is already compiled by another agency. Provide information on the link to this program and what are the costs of implementation and who will bear them.
- Provide information if there were existing sources of data that could simplify the work. Provide details on how dissemination of the data will happen and will the data be used. How and by whom?
- Provide details if this survey can be link with Thailand's One Tambon programme.
- This is an integrated, national census of households at the village level. There is pressure for complete information but not necessarily the financial resources or technical capability to do it. Provide information if there is a need to establish the baseline information at the community level and then follow-up with a CBMS type survey.
- The presentation emphasized the high value placed on the quality of data to be collected yet it also mentioned that the cadres received only one day of training. Provide information on how these two statements can jibe.

- Provide details on the number of pages of the questionnaire and how long it took to complete a single questionnaire.
- The nature of the questions on the sample questionnaire suggested a high level of acceptance of data collection and a high level of trust in the government. The sensitive nature of several questions were noted and emphasized the difficulties that such questions would pose in almost any other data collection situation.
- Provide information on the timeline for data processing and on the frequency of conducting the survey.
- The enumerators would carry out surveys of 40 households a day. This was not possible to be done effectively within the 8 hours of an average working day. Looking at the figures of households to be surveyed and the number of enumerators available, etc., 20 households might be a more reasonable number to aim for.
- Based on the the experience of Cambodia, the surveys themselves take a comparatively short time to complete and therefore the length of the survey itself may not be a great cause for concern. However, in Cambodia, the time taken to conduct X number of surveys is greatly increased by extensive travel/transit time between households and in tracking down respondents. It might be substantially different in Thailand.