
➔ **THE PHILIPPINES:
THE LONG ROAD TO RELIABLE AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS**

In a Nutshell

The Philippines' Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS) was established in 1987 to provide reliable and timely agricultural statistics. It has since emerged as a vital contributor to improved agricultural policy-making, programming and project formulation, and enjoys a premier status as a producer and disseminator of high quality information. The BAS story is one of an institution receiving constant and incremental technical cooperation for capacity development, which was provided synergistically by a number of agencies over time, growing steadily in quality and sophistication.

The BAS today serves as the statistical arm of the Department of Agriculture. It is governed by the policies of the Philippine Statistical System and serves as an active partner in many inter-agency activities housed or initiated by the National Statistical Coordination Board. At the field level, it is a vital and credible source of data for the agriculture sector.

The Story

The BAS was created to serve as the official agency of the Philippines' government for the generation, compilation and release of statistics on agriculture, fisheries and related fields. To develop the whole range of capacities needed for such an organization to function efficiently and intervene in policy formulation, a series of technical cooperation inputs were acquired from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), FAO and USAID.

The bank's technical cooperation focused on statistical research with an emphasis on improving sampling frames, survey designs, and data collection and crop forecasting methods; setting up personnel training; and implementing a decentralized data-processing system.

Then came a more detailed, nine-year USAID technical cooperation package. This included training in agricultural statistics, technical report writing, computer operation and management of survey operations. There was a master's degree course in statistics for BAS personnel as well as some non-degree training courses. This investment helped BAS set up a strong base for planning and for implementing its various statistical programmes and activities. It also helped reorient existing BAS field offices from mere data collection sites to functional operation centres. Crop and livestock production surveys were redesigned and alternative mechanisms for estimating fruit and vegetable production were devised.

This paved the way for rationalizing BAS' marketing and price information system. The composition of market baskets, including procedures for price data collection, were subsequently modified to conform with observed marketing practices in the production and trading areas to suit the needs of data users. Data users and producers came together in a series of national, regional and provincial symposia and workshops that helped both parties understand different expectations and limitations. The workshops also established and strengthened links with agribusiness.

Beyond improvements in data collection, processing and analysis, the USAID project also helped the BAS develop its information dissemination capacity. A number of publications were produced: an agribusiness directory series, marketing bulletins, and situation and outlook reports. The project published comic magazines to teach farmers about important agricultural issues. AgStatView, a bulletin, presented analysis of information on basic agricultural variables in an easy-to-understand format. Early warning systems began, along with an electronic system of disseminating agricultural data called the Electronic Access to Statistical Information Board (EASISBoard). Finally, through the Local Area Production and Marketing Analysis Service (LAPAMAS), the BAS collaborated with farmers' cooperatives as well as with national offices and local government units to produce a localized version of the AgStatView. This was supplemented by comic book presentations of information on agricultural production and the market situation.

Some months after the launching of LAPAMAS, a related outreach service dealing with the cost of agricultural production was conceived. This entailed highly specialized technical assessments, but the agricultural survey system could not afford to do a regular cost of production survey. Following meetings with various stakeholders, a collaborative activity with cooperatives began. Interested members could participate in the "recording project", where they underwent orientation on the mechanics of farm recording using a structured recording form. However, the complexity of recording and data processing meant that there was a considerable time lag before farmers got to see the results. The high costs and the need for sophisticated skills made the project unviable. Yet given the benefits, farmers petitioned for its continuation.

At this point, the BAS turned to FAO for assistance, which led to the Philippine Project on Assistance in Processing, Analysis and Utilization of Farm Level Data.

This initiative procured and installed hardware and software for on-site processing of records. Initially, central office staff edited these, but eventually local staff took over this responsibility along with the cooperatives, with a data processing system installed on the latter's computers. The project invested in training and farm level consultations, with the services of local experts plus the advice and supervision of FAO officers. While initially the project was carried out according to the design introduced by the experts, BAS staff modified the system over time in accordance with user requirements, balanced by the available resources.

Besides these specialized inputs, FAO has also provided BAS with staff study visits to other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. Through FAO-initiated regional forums such as the biennial Asia-Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics, expert meetings and seminars, BAS has the opportunity to inform FAO member countries of the results of its various capacity development initiatives.

Results and Critical Factors

The series of technical cooperation inputs that BAS received from the ADB, USAID and FAO significantly contributed to its efforts to be recognized as a dependable source of agricultural statistics, not only to support national agricultural policies, programmes and projects, but also in terms of wider sharing with the international community. Despite limitations imposed by government budgetary constraints, BAS has managed to maintain the prestige it has carefully nurtured over the years.

- Capacity development projects at BAS have clearly improved the knowledge and skills of staff, thus increasing their confidence in linking up with different partners and collaborators for expanding the delivery of BAS products and services.
- The organization has acquired specialized skills and is able to carry out fairly sophisticated surveys and data processing that benefits the agricultural sector. While technical cooperation was used to import skills and equipment, BAS' personnel capacity was systematically and simultaneously upgraded to the point where staff could modify various assessments and indicators to meet local needs.
- The dissemination of complex findings was done in easily comprehended formats such as comic books and radio broadcasts, a tactic that was especially important given that the primary clients for such information are farmers and farmers' cooperatives. The result was clear in the farmers' well-articulated demand for continuation of certain services.
- Donors and international agencies have demonstrated a willingness to stay engaged for the entire period that it takes to develop 360 degree capacities, and have continued to participate in the building of the BAS from time to time.

Further information

Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS) (bas.gov.ph).

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (www.aseansec.org).

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (www.fao.org/).

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