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**Training Statisticians from Other Countries – An  
Emerging Market for the Statistical Research and  
Training Center**

by

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# Training Statisticians from Other Countries – An Emerging Market for the Statistical Research and Training Center<sup>1</sup>

by

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## I. Introduction

The Statistical Research and Training Center (SRTC) is the focal agency on statistical training in the Philippines. It is one of the five major statistical agencies in a highly decentralized Philippine statistical system (PSS)<sup>3</sup> At present, the SRTC, for administrative supervision, is attached to the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), the premier socioeconomic planning body in the country. The mission of the SRTC is the improvement of the quality of statistical information generated by the PSS through the conduct of high quality, objective and responsive statistical research and training.

The legal basis from which the SRTC derives its authority to act as training arm of the PSS is Executive Order (EO) No. 121 issued on January 30, 1987. As specified in Section 10 of the said EO, the functions of the SRTC are as follows: (a) develop a comprehensive and integrated research and training program on the theories, concepts and methodologies for the promotion of the statistical system; (b) undertake research on statistical concepts, definitions and methods; (c) promote collaborative research efforts among members of the academic community, data producers and users; (d) conduct non-degree training programs to upgrade the quality of statistical manpower base in support of the needs of the statistical system; and (e) provide financial and other forms of assistance to enhance statistical research and developments.

Organizationwise, the SRTC is headed by an Executive Director. He is supported by two technical divisions - the Research and Training Divisions - and an Administrative Services Division in carrying out the mandated functions of the agency. It also has a Governing Board which formulates policies for the management and operations of the agency. At present, the SRTC has a total manpower complement of twenty-five (25) personnel only.

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<sup>3</sup> The country's statistical system or PSS is a highly decentralized one. It consists of all departments, bureaus, offices, agencies and instrumentalities of the national and local governments and government-owned and controlled corporations that are engaged in statistical activities either as a major function or as a necessary part of their administrative and regulatory functions. On the other hand, the four other major statistical agencies in the PSS are the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), National Statistics Office (NSO), Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS) and Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics (BLES).

The specific unit responsible for the development and implementation of non-degree training programs of the agency is the Training Division. The division is headed by a Division Chief or Statistician V, who is supported by a Statistician IV, two Statistician III, a Statistician II and two clerk-typists. All in all, the division has a total manpower complement of seven (7) personnel only, or about a fourth of the total workforce of the agency. With this small set up, the division is expected to provide high quality statistical training services to the entire statistical system while also earning from the services that it provides.

## **II. Training Programs and Courses Conducted by SRTC for International Clients**

Since its creation in 1987, the Center has been conducting training programs and courses for international clients such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank (WB), and agencies under the United Nations such as UNICEF, UNDP and Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP). Here, it should be noted that these training programs are usually undertaken for the benefit of local and/or foreign statisticians. For the last three years, the agency has been averaging three training programs under this arrangement. The list of training programs conducted by SRTC for the period 2002 up to August 2004 is shown in the attached table.

## **III. Market Outlook for SRTC in Training Foreign Statisticians**

As can be seen from the table, there is an upward trend in the number of training programs conducted by SRTC for statisticians of other countries. This trend is expected to continue as SRTC starts to firm up its foothold in the international market for statistical training. Among the factors that seem to contribute to this positive outlook are the following:

1. SRTC has a professional, English speaking, and well-experienced training staff that can handle any kind of statistical training. This is borne out by the fact that the agency has been operating for more than a decade already and has built its reputation around expert performance in handling and managing statistical training programs for both local and international clients. These valuable core competencies will serve as major building blocks for the strategy that will sustain the Center over the other training institutions operating in Asia and the Pacific region.
2. The agency has a pool of trainers and resource persons that can be readily tapped for any statistical training. These resource persons are practicing statisticians and professionals with extensive teaching experience in the academe, non-government offices and international organizations. Some of them are connected with academic institutions such as the School of Statistics at the main campus of the University of

the Philippines (UP) in Diliman, Quezon City and the Institute of Statistics at the UP Los Banos in Laguna while others are connected with the major statistical agencies. Other lecturers are freelance human resource development experts and communication media specialists. For IT-related training, the SRTC usually tap resource persons from private IT companies, Management Information System (MIS) unit of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), and other government agencies. This competitive edge came into fore when the agency hosted the UN SIAP's Research-based Training Program in early 2004 where about 15 local experts were called to serve as lecturers and/or advisers to the participants from 11 countries in Asia and the Pacific region, including the Philippines. Since these people were mostly based in the academe and statistical agencies, the Center did not encounter problems in getting them as resource persons for the training.

3. The Center has a growing customer base for international training. The recent selection of the Center as one of the partner-institutions of the UN Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) in the conduct of its off-Tokyo training courses, as well as its growing partnership with the World Bank Institute (WBI) in conducting statistical capacity building on poverty measurement and analysis, are some of the developments that attest to this growing clientele of the Center. Also, the choice of the Royal Government of Bhutan for the Center to handle the training of their statisticians and planning staff on poverty estimation and analysis is an achievement that will surely lead to more country-specific training by the Center in the future.
4. SRTC is in a position to capitalize on opportunities. Being a small organization, the SRTC has the ability to respond to any opportunities that may arise even on short notice. This capability has been proven in many instances already. For example, the 3-week training on poverty estimation and analysis for the Royal Government of Bhutan was undertaken on a 3-week notice last August 2004 although negotiations for this training started as early as June 2004. Also, the four-week training on sample design for household and establishment surveys for the statisticians of different countries in Asia and the Pacific in 2002 was undertaken by SRTC for UN SIAP with less than six-month lead-time. This advantage of the agency will become handy every time extra funds for training are made available by foreign funding institutions and decisions on their disposition are to be made expeditiously.
5. SRTC enjoys cost advantages in competing in the international market for statistical training. Given the fact that SRTC is a public entity and therefore derives much of its resources from the government, it is able to adopt a low-cost provider strategy, which serves as basis for gaining a foothold in the market. At the same time, it offers its clients something customized to their requirements or needs. In the long run, this advantage will be one of the major reasons that will make SRTC a preferred training institution over the other similar institutions operating

in the region. Also, this innate edge can be used as springboard for expanding the agency's client base in the area.

6. The Philippines is still preferred by foreign/international entities as venue for the conduct of their training. Given the abundance of good facilities for the conduct of training, the generally low cost of conducting a training, the availability of qualified resource persons for any kind of statistical training, and the general hospitality of Filipinos as training host, the Philippines still ranks high among the Asian countries as a preferred site for training by many foreign institutions.

#### **IV. Enhancing the SRTC's Competitive Position in the Market for Training Foreign Statisticians**

Although SRTC has many distinct and innate advantages that will allow it to establish its own niche in the market for training foreign statisticians, there are some aspects of its operation that must be looked into and attended to so that it can effectively compete in the market. Among these are:

1. The Center should upgrade its facilities to make them world class. Among the facilities the agency should make comparable with those of other training institutions are its computer facilities, audio-visual equipment and software packages for its training. Also, its internet access and web page should be upgraded so as to enable participants to do uninterrupted electronic mails, browsing, downloading and link to a number of global and local search engines. To address these problems, the SRTC should maximize the use of the authority given to it through Section 8 of the General Appropriations Act (GAA) which allows the use of its income from training activities to finance the needed improvement in its training facilities. Also, the SRTC could set aside some of the income it generates from investing its endowment fund to finance the upgrading of its facilities. However, for the expensive packages that are needed in its training but cannot be purchased immediately, the SRTC should continue its usual arrangements with the local distributors for the free use of such packages.
2. The agency must expand its resource/funding base to support its capability-building program in training. Although SRTC has several sources of funds to finance its activities, these are not enough. Given only a regular budget of about P10.0 million a year, it should find ways to expand its resources. One promising approach that the agency could pursue along this line is to seek the continuous augmentation of its endowment fund with the help of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and other influential government agencies. Hopefully, through this approach, activities pivotal to the strengthening the capability of the agency to handle and manage statistical training could be funded.

3. SRTC should maintain its strong linkages with the local experts and institutions so as to ensure the availability of needed expertise for its training program. Since the present sourcing strategy adopted by SRTC for its resource persons is highly dependent on its ability to get these expertise from key institutions like the academe, major statistical agencies, and other agencies, it is, therefore, necessary for SRTC to have good relationships with these key institutions. This strategy should also be complemented with good incentives (like offering competitive honoraria) so as to ensure that potential resource persons from these institutions will really work for SRTC.
  
4. The agency should institute a quality assurance program at each stage of training activity. From the project origination to the pre-training training preparation, to the conduct of training proper and finally, to the post-training stage, the agency should institute and enforce up-to-date and effective quality management practices. At present, the pre-training preparation and post-training stage are the weakest links in the chain of activities for training in the organization. Hopefully, through some training, this problem could be straightened out and standards could be put in place to serve as guide to the staff. Also, compliance effort to these standards should permeate the agency, extending into every personnel of the organization.

## **V. Conclusion**

Given the move taken recently by the government to scale down its activities so as to reduce its expenditures and consequently its budget deficit, and considering the fact that the government is the main client of SRTC, it is expected that this decision on the part of the government will have a negative impact on SRTC, especially on its training activities. With this “not so good” outlook in the local market for training, there is a need therefore for SRTC to look for other markets of its expertise. One option that looks promising is the market for training foreign statisticians. On the other hand, since SRTC has already shown its capability in handling and managing training for foreign statisticians and with some adjustments in its operation along areas mentioned earlier, a move on its part to tap the market for training foreign statisticians would therefore be a step in the right direction. Aside from partially covering the expected decline in the number of local training to be conducted in the years to come, the measure will also provide an opportunity for SRTC to help the government in earning badly needed foreign currencies and eventually, in dealing with its problem on budget deficit. Likewise, the move could be used as a means to raise funds that can be utilized in subsidizing some of the agency’s training programs for local statisticians.

<b>Year/Training Program Conducted/Funding or Sponsoring Institution</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Type of Participants</b>	<b>Duration</b>
2002 Seventh Course/Workshop on Sample Design for Household and Establishment Surveys (UN SIAP)	26	Local and foreign participants with 16 countries represented	March 13-April 12, 2002 (4 weeks)
Distance Learning Course on Basic Poverty Measurements and Diagnostic (WB Institute)	25	Local participants but training was held simultaneously in Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam	June 10-21, 2002 (2 weeks)
2003 Series of Training Programs under Statistical Capacity Building for Rural Sector (WB)	400	Local participants with BAS and LGU personnel as main beneficiaries	First training was held on April 14, 2003 and 14 <sup>th</sup> or last training for the year was held on December 10, 2003
2004 Series of Training Programs under Statistical Capacity Building for Rural Sector (WB)	443	Local participants with BAS and LGU personnel as main beneficiaries	First training was held on January 19, 2004 and 18 <sup>th</sup> or last training for the year was held on June 30, 2004
First Regional Course Research-Training Program (UN SIAP)	12	Local and foreign participants with 11 countries represented	February 16-March 26, 2004 (6 weeks)
In-Country Course on Basic Poverty and Diagnostic (WB Institute)	36	Local participants	June 30-July 9, 2004 (8 days)
Country Course on Small Area Estimation (UN SIAP)	21	Local participants	July 19-30, 2004 (2 weeks)
Training on Poverty Estimation and Analysis for Royal Government of Bhutan (UNDP Bhutan)	4	Foreign participants but exclusively for statisticians and technical staff of the Royal Government of Bhutan	August 9-27, 2004 (3 weeks)