

Discussion of Marissa L. Barcenas, “ The Development of the 2003 Master Sample (MS) For Philippines Household Surveys”, by I.P. David.

Maris should be commended for this well-written paper. I enjoyed reading it.

I had been involved peripherally in some steps of the 2003 MS development, first through a series of meetings arranged by NSO to review the design and experience with the previous master sample; and second as chair of the Technical Committee on Survey Design before which the new MS was discussed lengthily in two or three meetings. Hence, I may not be a good judge of the clarity of completeness of the MS technical and operational details as presented by Maris, for I might have an unconscious tendency to read between the lines or see more than what is written. Perhaps it is best left to the audience to ask more clarifications on these matters. In the short time we have, I limit the discussion on the following points.

1. *Importance of adequate documentation* . Maris and Dax and Jun will recall the great difficulty we had in trying to decipher the real sampling design of the previous MS. That is because what little was written about the work that went into choosing the sampling scheme and selecting the sample did not match what was on the ground. In the end, the “friends of NSO” group had no other recourse except to ‘guess’ the design and the sampling unit weights to be used for design-based estimators.

Maris’ paper, therefore, is a welcome positive step towards having adequate documentation on the 2003 MS- for users, NSO, and even NSOs of other countries. In this connection, I wish that there would be a next paper setting the estimation procedures for point estimates, changes, domain point estimates and changes, as well as for sampling errors. Such documentation is important for users outside NSO to follow, especially since the sampling scheme is quite complicated.

2. *Change in geographic domain* – from 82 provinces and cities, to 17 regions. This was a very much debated and difficult decision, but I think a correct one based on quantitative empirical evidence. Most household surveys not only of NSO but of the Philippines statistical system had as expressed objective-and thus were so designed-to provide provincial estimates. However, with very few exceptions (I can readily think of rice and corn statistics only), the surveys failed to meet this objective when judged on the basis of the resulting precision levels of the provincial estimates. In other words, if the agencies in charge of these surveys were subjected to performance audits of their activities vis-à-vis objectives, they would have obtained failing marks. The developers of the 2003 MS showed convincingly that retaining the province as domain and setting CVs of under 10 percent for the estimates will require quadrupling the sample size (which at 44,0000 is already quite large). There simply would not be enough resources to sustain such massive survey over a long period. One can only wish at this point that other surveys of the PSS, including the industry and agricultural surveys, be subjected to the same evidence-based assessment.

3. Household or Family? The 2003 MS (and others before it) used the household as design variable and ultimate sampling unit. Why, then, does NSO's income and expenditure survey (FIES) use the family as ultimate sampling unit? I know this was not in Maris' paper, but the questions begs to be asked.