

Official Statistics – Progressing with the Times

After the post-war baby boom and the influx of Mainland migrants, Hong Kong had experienced a dramatic increase in population and a rapid economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s. The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) was set up in 1967, signifying the embarkation of official statistics. The major pre-occupation was undoubtedly the 1971 Population Census. In the same year, a Census of Manufacturing Establishments, being the first of its kind, was also taken.

In the 1970s, C&SD developed a programme of economic surveys and also conducted the Labour Force Survey, which laid a strong foundation for the official statistical system.

Mr Alvin Li Wing Kong, who joined C&SD in 1980 and is now an Assistant Commissioner, has witnessed the continuous progress of official statistics in the past thirty years, including the substantial changes brought about by technological development in data collection work.

Mr Li said, “In the past, personal interviews and self-administered postal questionnaires were the main modes to collect data. To improve efficiency and be in line with the latest technological development, Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) was introduced in the Quarterly Survey of Employment and Vacancies to collect data for the first time in 1990.”



Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing technique was introduced to collect data starting from 1990.

“Given that computer applications were not extensive at that time, the implementation of CATI faced a number of difficulties and challenges. For example, colleagues who were involved in interviewing and supervisory work had to be trained to cope with the changes in the work process.”

“Nowadays, CATI is widely adopted to collect data in surveys. The use of electronic questionnaires is also actively promoted in recent years. In the 2011 Population Census, there will be a new online system to provide more user-friendly electronic questionnaires for the public.”

Mr Li pointed out that information technology has also changed the way of

disseminating data. Apart from issuing press releases and statistical publications, C&SD established the departmental website in 1996 to provide the public with the latest comprehensive statistical information.

He added, "C&SD is among the first group of Government departments to set up its own departmental website. The website is continuously enriched in contents and enhanced in features. Since 2006, it has been distributing new feeds on website updates to the subscribers using Really Simple Syndication. E-mail notification service was also launched in 2007, in which registered users can receive email updates of selected statistical subjects. At present, the C&SD Website is one of the top ten popular Government websites."

Turning to the cultivation of a customer-oriented culture, Mr Li expressed that C&SD is committed to reduce respondent burden as well as to facilitate data usage.

On respondents' front, C&SD has adopted a "rotational replicate sample design" in the General Household Survey. Upon completing two rounds of interview (three months apart), sampled households will not be selected for any household surveys conducted by C&SD in the subsequent three years.

Besides, a "Customer Window Scheme" has been launched since 2003. A Customer Relations Officer is arranged for each of the selected prominent companies to coordinate all matters in relation to C&SD surveys for the company.

Mr Li said, "This scheme can reduce the burden of enumerated companies during data reporting, improve the response rates of surveys and ensure the consistency of data collected."

On data users' front, a free download policy was implemented in 2006 to allow users to download publications and statistical tables from the C&SD Website at any time. This policy can also reduce the demand for printed copies, and is more environmental friendly.

Mr Li said, "To cope with this ever-changing society, we need to ensure that our statistics are reliable and timely. Data collection and dissemination methods should progress with the times, promoting a user-based culture to facilitate users to obtain convenient and environmental services."

The public can visit www.censtatd.gov.hk for a better understanding of the work of C&SD.