

DISCUSSION

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My comments refer to the difficulties and problems of statistical activities in underdeveloped areas, some of which have been mentioned in the papers just presented, especially by Dedrick; rather than to their results as summarized by Mauldin and Aidenoff. The results are often impaired by difficulties of which statisticians from other areas are unaware. Census taking offers many illustrations. The net underenumeration of the population of the United States in the 1960 census was estimated at a meeting yesterday to be between 3 and 3½ million. It is evident that difficulties in obtaining an accurate count still exist; but a larger number have undoubtedly been overcome by experience and research during the nine decades since the historic report by General Francis A. Walker on the problems and deficiencies of the census of 1870. We cannot be too complaining about inaccuracies in census figures in areas lacking the long experience and public habituation to census inquiries of the United States; but we should not be unaware of their existence and the reasons for them.

When statisticians from advanced nations are asked to advise in areas of lesser development, frustration may result from barriers of communication. These are often augmented by differences in social institutions and attitudes. Perhaps we try to inculcate in the indigenous statistician the idea--at variance with his training, which has been one of learning by rote--that he should think for himself. He is inspired by this new idea, only to be criticized for seeking when in the field to improve on the exact specifications of a carefully designed sample survey.

The barriers to be overcome in extending the use of statistical techniques to underdeveloped areas are thus not merely linguistic but broadly sociological and cultural. Family organization, relationships between employers and employees, even such seemingly definite conceptions as age, may be viewed and recorded in statistical surveys from standpoints very different from our own. Age in Korea traditionally refers to the number of separate calendar years within which one has lived (complicated further by a lunar calendar) and not, as among ourselves, to the number of years of 12 months which have elapsed since birth.

Again, what meanings can be attached to "labor force" and "national income" when a national economy is based upon small agricultural holdings, consumption in the household of what is produced, and a considerable amount of barter? Figures on these subjects derived by the methods of imputation used in more advanced economies are hazardous for international comparisons. Such problems are not uniquely those of underdeveloped countries. They have earlier been encountered in the more advanced nations which have found solutions consistent with their own economic order and institutional patterns.

There has been a recent shift of attention among international organizations from the promotion of statistical comparability between countries to efforts directed at indigenous statistical development. The growth of indigenous statistical systems, adapted in each case to the special needs of the countries concerned, seems in need of greater attention.