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SESSION 4: CONFLICTS BETWEEN INNOVATION AND CONTINUITY

CONFLICTS BETWEEN INNOVATION AND CONTINUITY: JAPAN'S CASE

Report submitted by Statistics Bureau,
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Summary

1. When there are new socioeconomic phenomena which are difficult to interpret from existing statistics, statistical users often complain about insufficiency of official statistics, and ask for changes in official statistics so that they may provide more useful information to interpret the new phenomena better. On the other hand, changing or innovating official statistics involve not only an additional cost but also risks such as causing breaks in time series or abandoning the existing time series. In such a conflicting situation, it is necessary to consider carefully whether changes are truly needed or not, and if so, what kind of changes they should be.

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2. This paper presents a view on how to resolve the conflicts between innovation and continuity in producing official statistics. The innovation or changes to be discussed in this paper are limited to those concerning statistical surveys rather than derived statistics. The

authors think that the problem is not necessarily an alternative choice but quite often

a matter of balancing between the two options. In this sense, the authors think that, before making a decision to change, it is very important to assess very carefully the urgency to change the present statistics in comparison with the necessary of maintaining the existing statistical series and to find out the real causes of users' complaints. In this process, solutions to satisfy the true needs of users may often be found without disturbing the existing statistical series. If changes are considered to be truly needed as a result of the assessment, it is necessary to take various measures to avoid or minimize discontinuity of statistical series.

3. This paper will consist of four sections. First, the authors' view will be described in detail on the problem of innovation and continuity. The next three sections describe three recent cases at Statistics Bureau of Japan as examples of discussions on changes in official statistics. The first example refers to the Consumer Price Index, where some information supplementing the CPI has been additionally provided to help users better understand the current situation of prices, and no methodological change was introduced in the framework of the CPI. The second example refers to the monthly Family Income and Expenditure Survey, where a new regular survey has been started to supplement the existing survey. The third example refers to the monthly Labour Force Survey, where a plan to redesign the survey is now being considered in order to provide more information concerning the unemployed and underemployed. Finally, at the end of the paper, some concluding remarks will be given.
