

one of the witnesses, Professor Richard Ruggles, stated with reference to the present system:

* * * The term "decentralized," while applicable, may be somewhat misleading * * * it has been the result of a jungle-like growth of statistical activities by different government agencies having widely differing purposes. The result has been extensive duplication and lack of coordination. * * * Although the Office of Statistical Standards has led to considerable improvement and rationalization, the Federal statistical system continues to operate on a highly decentralized and uncoordinated basis.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS ON THE EFFICIENCY OF OUR STATISTICAL SYSTEM?

On the basis of testimony, the subcommittee concludes that the present methods of operating our statistical programs have become obsolete in the sense that the need for integration and data availability have outstripped progress. At the present time, statistical programs require radical improvement to take advantage of modern technology and to meet the new and rapidly expanding needs of policy and analysis.

Although the situation described in the previous section was not ideal before the advent of the computer, it was then infeasible to relate large bodies of data either at one period of time or over long periods of time. However, computer technology has drastically increased the speed and efficiency of handling data and has made possible entirely new kinds of analysis. It has also greatly simplified the problem of data storage and retrieval.

The statistical series produced by Government agencies serve reasonably well the traditional tasks of management. But they are totally inadequate to meet the changing policy needs of our times—to aid in the planning of modern corporations and in the design and operation of new Government programs and the improvement of existing ones. Our rather isolated pieces of information do not fit into a general system. But this is a minor part of the difficulty since every general system has its limitations and inflexibilities. The real difficulty with the present system is its lack of flexibility, which is needed to interrelate different bodies of data. One witness, Dr. Edgar Dunn, expressed the present situation as follows:

* * * We are still living in identical statistical "rowhouses," so to speak, when we have the technology and means to adopt the architecture to the size and interests of the family.

The information contained in the statistical publications cannot be easily manipulated or related. Moreover, the micro data that were used to produce the aggregated series have frequently not been maintained in usable form, nor are the various bodies of basic data compatible due to a lack of coordination in the original production processes. The detailed data, then, which are being collected at great cost and inconvenience are not being fully utilized to produce the wide variety of aggregate statistics needed or to study micro relationships. While some efforts are now going forward to put new additions to the stock of data into machine readable form for improved accessibility, much more effort on a Government-wide basis is needed.