Social Indicators and Social Statistics Survey In Korea

1. Social Indicators

Social indicators are the gauge of the welfare standards of a nation and represent the social conditions and overtime change in both quantity and quality. By providing crucial information on social problems and changes, they can help us be aware of undesirable changes occurring in society and possibly intervene to correct or redirect them.

The objectives of the system of social indicators are:
- To synthetically provide information on the social status
- To measure the progress of living standards and life
- To show the level of national welfare.

There are three major functions of social indicators.
The first is the function of social policy, which is related to evaluating specific policies and formulating policy and social account systems.
The second is the function of social dynamics, which is to measure the status and change of society and to assist in monitoring the general economic performance of the society.
The last one is the social reporting function, which is to improve the social information system and predict the social problems and the conditions of life.

1.1 Historical Background of Social Indicators in Korea

Social indicators were developed in a series of efforts to shift the focus of development from economy to society beginning in the mid-1970s. The development of the social indicators system was conducted jointly by the Korea National Statistical Office (KNSO) and Korea Development Institute (KDI) under the financial support of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) in 1975, generating the report of social indicators system in Korea in 1978. For the establishment of this system, the social statistics survey was carried out in 1977 for the first time in Korea.
The first round of the social indicators system consisted of 350 indicators in 8 areas, which were population, income and consumption, labor, education, health, housing and environment, society (family, social security and leisure), and safety. The first Social Indicators Report was published in 1979, containing 128 indicators in 8 areas.

Korea has experienced continuous economic growth as well as political and social change for the past several decades and is now rapidly changing in the currents of globalization, localization and informatization. Consequently, the social situation and national consciousness in every aspect of life are also changing radically. In response to the change of social conditions and interests, it is expected that demand for new statistics on such areas as social welfare, environment, information and social participation, comprising indices by region or province, will steadily increase. Accordingly, the KNSO revised the system of social indicators twice in 1987 and in 1995 to reflect economic and social changes.

The first revision of the social indicators system was focused on the upgraded lifestyle from the nation's economic growth. The 1987 system has 468 indicators in 9 areas by adding leisure to the 8 areas in the 1978 system. The 1995 system includes 553 indicators in 13 areas by breaking out three important categories from the existing ones (family separated from population, social security from society, and environment from housing and environment) and the newly added social participation. To capture in greater detail various changes occurring in the lifestyle, the way of thinking, and the household economic situation, the social indicators system expanded further. The 2003 Social Indicators in Korea was recently published on 492 indicators in 13 areas based on the social indicators system constructed in 1995. This book contains major results of the social statistics surveys conducted by the KNSO and statistical data produced by the KNSO and other organizations producing statistics.

1.2 Recent Work on the System of Social Indicators in Korea

As the 1995 social indicators system is no more suitable to reflect various changes in the lifestyle and social conditions, the social indicators system is currently being redesigned. The main points for consideration in the reconstruction are to produce
a better system to report the social status and assess social progress in each area and to maintain the same level of convenience and ease in getting information promptly through the social indicators. Particularly, for the assessment of social progress, the KNSO is considering the development of composite indexes in selected areas.

2. Social Statistics Survey

The social statistics survey was conducted for the first time in 1977. Since 1979, the survey has been conducted annually to collect information on personal views and social concerns of the Korean people. The survey consists of 12 areas in entirety and 3 areas have been surveyed each year alternating in area selection since 1996. The 12 areas are family, labor, health, environment, education, income and consumption, housing and transportation, information and telecommunication, welfare, culture and leisure, safety, and social participation.

When the survey was first implemented, the objective was to collect data which were not available in the existing statistics to compile social indicators. Therefore, the survey results were published in 「The Social Indicators in Korea」 from 1979 to 1995. The quality of life, social values and conceptions of the Korean people have changed greatly through rapid economic growth and social development. Thus, since 1996, the social statistics survey has included the items to meet the needs of social statistics from users and the survey results are released in 「The Report on the Social Statistics Survey」 every year.

2.1 Survey scope and method

The survey covers all persons 15 years old and over and all household heads in the country. The survey households are approximately 30,000 and each household members of 15 years and over in the sample households are surveyed, who totals about 70,000 individuals. The interview method is used for data collection in principle, conducted by interviewers at the KNSO's local branch offices.