

12 December, 2003

Policy Plan for the ANed-BMS umbrella, 2004-2008

1 Background

The Biometric Section (BMS) of the Dutch Society for Statistics and Operational Research ('Vereniging voor Statistiek en Operationele Research' or VVS-OR) and the Dutch Region ('Afdeling Nederland' or ANed) of the International Biometric Society (IBS) constitute an umbrella within the Dutch statistical world. The term 'umbrella' we use in this document refers to a partially combined organization structure and a number of combined activities. The ANed-BMS umbrella is geared toward promoting biometric research with a clearly recognizable statistical component. Biometry in this sense is broadly applied in society. The present document's background is to clearly define the ANed-BMS umbrella's position in order to improve visibility within Dutch society in general and in the statistical world in particular.

There is an organizational link of old to the VVS-OR as well as the IBS. The VVS-OR organizes the annual Statistics Day in which the various sections, including the BMS, present themselves with a session in the afternoon programme. The IBS organizes the biennial International Biometric Conference. The International Biometric Conference is geared toward the international biometric community.

The ANed-BMS umbrella's president is a member of the VVS-OR board. From the moment that ANed and BMS joined forces, the umbrella's intention has been to function as one entity. In the text below, the two 'blood types' will have to be distinguished now and then. However, the policy will always aim to minimize this distinction, so that both groups may take advantage of each other's background and dynamics. In this document we will therefore consistently refer to the ANed-BMS umbrella, always meaning both sections. Only where that is impossible will we make an explicit distinction.

Membership

Members of the ANed-BMS umbrella come from two sources: IBS members who live in the Netherlands, and VVS-OR members who have expressed their wish to join the BMS. ANed has four membership categories: regular member, associate member, student member, and honorary member. BMS and ANed members usually work at universities, academic hospitals, research institutes and companies, as well as in government institutions and consultancy. After a peak in 1995–1996, the number of members has shown a clear decline in recent years. The BMS was founded in 1996 as a merger of the agricultural section and the medical-biological section. Its membership figures show a similar curve. This decline has several causes, which are also at the root of the decline of VVS-OR membership as a whole. The most important factor appears to be the waning interest in science. Moreover, the image of statistics plays a specific role: it is still seen as a rather dull science, which can be manipulated in order to reach the desired conclusions. Incidentally, many of our members have joined both ANed and the BMS, so that the membership figure of the ANed-BMS umbrella does not equal the sum of the BMS and ANed membership figures.

Organization

Within the ANed-BMS umbrella, the VVS-OR's BMS is connected to the IBS's ANed. The aim is to reach the closest possible unity between the two organizations. For instance: there is a single board, and members of both organizations are treated and approached in the same way.

The ANed-BMS umbrella's objective is to coordinate and stimulate biometric activities. In order to achieve this, the working group organizes a number of activities every year or two years:

- i) a biennial spring meeting;
- ii) an autumn meeting;
- iii) a session during Statistics Day.

Sometimes, i) and iii) are combined. Furthermore, the ANed-BMS umbrella is actively involved in registering biostatisticians, and the working group in its turn has a (limited) number of working groups whose areas of attention fit the current biometric context, and whose composition varies. Finally, the ANed-BMS umbrella organizes a 'Best Paper Award' which is granted every two years during the spring meeting.

Membership of the ANed-BMS umbrella cannot be disconnected from the two organizations out of which it was formed. ANed knows two forms of membership: individual and institutional. Any ANed member automatically receives the journal *Biometrics*. BMS members are automatically VVS-OR members, and any VVS-OR member may choose to join the BMS. BMS members automatically receive the journal *Statistica Neerlandica*, and are invited to Statistics Day. The ANed-BMS umbrella is concerned about future developments. The main reasons for this concern lie in the declining number of members and in the lack of interest younger people show to join either organization.

2 Mission

The ANed-BMS umbrella aims to promote the study and application of statistical methods in agricultural, medical and biological questions, for the benefit of science and society.

It is one of the ANed-BMS umbrella's goals to allow individual members to take advantage of general activities/frameworks which the umbrella offers its members.

Promoting these interests is done first and foremost by members:

- organizing seminars and conferences in order to inform members of relevant developments in the field;
- offering a network of people and organizations, through the working group's web site, conferences and seminars, and active involvement in the Register of Biostatisticians;
- improving the use and image of statistics in the relevant fields.

The ANed-BMS umbrella should contribute to improving the field's connection with other fields. An important part of this is making statistics accessible, because it is still too often seen as a strongly mathematical and formula-oriented science. To the BMS, it is the application of mathematically well-formulated methods of analysis for the benefit of society which is of the greatest importance.

3 Target group

The ANed-BMS umbrella's target group consists of those who work on the application or development of quantitative methods and statistics in agricultural, medical or biological matters. Members of the target group usually take a rather strong interest in mathematics. The target group largely consists of academics and biometric professionals in universities, research institutes, (pharmaceutical) industry, consultancy and academic hospitals. Traditionally, the universities of Wageningen, Leiden and Rotterdam are represented by the largest numbers, but other universities (Utrecht, Nijmegen, Amsterdam and Groningen) are active as well. Especially the statistics departments and the academic medical centres (LUMC, UMC, Erasmus MC) have a high profile in this regard. Research institutes that are well represented are RIVM, TNO and Biometris, while a small number of consultancy agencies also has representatives in the umbrella organization. Representatives of industries mostly come from the pharmaceutical industry, e.g. from companies such as Solvay Pharmaceuticals and Organon. These institutions are usually characterized by a relatively large biometric component in daily work.

The ANed-BMS umbrella has chosen a wide definition for its target group. People in professions which may merely sideways be related to biometry are equally welcome to join BMS and ANed. Their interests concerning biometry are represented by BMS and

ANed in the best way possible as well.

4 Network and public relations

Serving as a forum is an important function of the ANed-BMS umbrella. The various conferences and other activities are an important means to this end, as well as the umbrella organization's close involvement in the Register of Biostatisticians. This VVS-OR initiative aims, among other things, for recognition of biostatisticians as an occupational group. The forum function can be attractive to businesses, to which it offers direct access to the available knowledge and an easy way to stay in touch with new developments on the one hand, and a shortcut to receiving and giving commissions on the other.

International positioning receives more and more attention. Apart from the direct contact between ANed and the IBS, the current objective is to organize an activity together with a foreign organization on a reasonably regular basis. This was done for the first time in 2001. The aim is to further strengthen this initiative by co-organizing the biennial meeting with Belgium, Germany and/or England once in every four years. Concerning the developing countries, the L.C.A. Corsten Fund promotes further statistical support for work and science in countries of the Third World.

An important part of the network consists of the working groups within the ANed-BMS umbrella, of which there are six at present. Members of working groups are not automatically members of the ANed-BMS umbrella. The following procedure has been formed in order to form and stay a viable working group of the ANed-BMS umbrella.

- A proposal to form a new working group is submitted to the board of the ANed-BMS umbrella. This may be either a working group that is founded with the support of BMS and/or ANed, or an existing working group that comes under the aegis of ANed-BMS.
- The board judges the proposal, taking into consideration its feasibility, scope and innovative aspects as well as the degree to which it fits the Dutch biometric context.
- If the board's judgment is positive, it establishes the new working group.
- The working group organizes activities and reports to the board.
- Through its web site, the section gives access to information on the working groups' activities.
- If a working group has not organized any activities for a year, it may be declared dormant after deliberation between the BMS/ANed board and the working group.
- If a working group fails to organize any activities for another year, the board will consider terminating the working group, consulting its president.

Working groups are important to the ANed-BMS umbrella, because they make a closer contact with more specific target groups possible on the one hand [Dutch text is incomplete].

5 Consequences

A succinct analysis of the umbrella organization's strengths and weaknesses leads to the following conclusions. The strength was and is in the qualities of the individuals, personally speaking as well as based on their positions within organizations. It will remain important to collect, process and analyse data on living organisms with the utmost care. To this end, good biostatisticians are needed, who have to be trained. As such, they are a recognizable occupational group within Dutch (and Flemish) society. An organization to connect them is indispensable.

The weakness is that the biostatistician's profession is still highly craftlike and aims to serve, since it is also intellectually challenging and highly internal. A biostatistician is often busy chasing figures and takes action where there are legal requirements, where data have been or have to be collected and where others make an appeal to him or her. Despite the procedures that have been developed and sometimes implemented and a broad range of software packages, much of the work still has to be done by hand. Moreover, the profession lacked visibility in the past, the statistician's notorious warning

finger did not earn us many friends, and a statistician/biostatistician is not always a good communicator in every respect. The opportunity to create a connecting organization within the VVS and within the IBS has been taken; the challenge remains to unite as many of these professionals as possible and keep catering to their needs.

The ANed-BMS umbrella's policy will therefore aim for the following goals:

- to keep representing activities in the field of biometry in the sense of providing statistical foundations for the measurement of living subjects;
- to serve as a forum regarding biometry in which the exchange of services and activities has a key role;
- to promote biometry in research, industry and practice;
- to represent biometric and biostatistical work in all relevant committees;
- to further and, if necessary, help develop and evaluate a sound training in statistics for students of the various life sciences.

To this end, the ANed-BMS umbrella has at its disposal:

- a session on Statistics Day;
- two meetings a year;
- contacts with companies, research institutes, universities and various authorities through members and through the web site;
- a web site that is kept up to date;
- the Biometry Award for the best scientific publication in the field.

In order to improve public relations, the ANed-BMS umbrella will contact representatives of various disciplines in which biometry is used. In these contacts, the ANed-BMS umbrella will emphasize the importance of biometry and endeavour to highlight the biometric aspects of research planned in these other disciplines as early as the stage in which project proposals are drawn up. This can be done by actively participating in non-statistical meetings, councils, committees and organizations, in studying and discussing statistical components in non-statistical research, and seeking publicity in journals that are not necessarily statistical in nature.

6 Financial means

The ANed-BMS umbrella is a non-profit organization. Activities are organized in a cost-effective way whenever possible. If participants are asked for a contribution, the members shall receive a discount.

Appendix

Development of ANed membership figures

ANED membership

0

20

40

60

80

100

120

140

160

1991 1996 2001

Regular

