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## SOME PROPOSALS TO PROMOTE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRINCIPLES FOR INTERNATIONAL STATISTICS

Prepared by E. Giovannini – OECD

### 1. Introduction

1. Over the last two years the CCSA has discussed how to reinforce the overall co-ordination of the activities carried out by international organisations (IOs), both within and outside the UN family. At its last meeting (September 2004) the Committee agreed on a “vision” of the development of the international statistical system based on common principles, agreed practices, statistical standards, shared infrastructures, etc. The following pillars of an international statistical system were identified:

- *Principles for conducting statistical activities in IOs*, mirroring what the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (FP) establish for national statistical systems;
- *Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) between IOs* to define the division of labour and respective competencies, mirroring what national legislations represent for the activities of national statistical systems;
- *Methodological guidelines and recommendations* to promote the development of accurate and comparable statistics across the world;
- *Technical standards and recommendations* to make data and metadata exchange as efficient as possible;
- *Quality assurance frameworks* to promote the implementation of good statistical and ITC practice within IOs;
- *Training and other “capacity building” initiatives* to sustain IOs’ activities and improve the statistical skills of their statisticians.

2. This paper contains ideas to address these issues over the next few months, with the ultimate goal of preparing an overall proposal for consideration of the CCSA at its September meeting.

### 2. Principles and recommended practices: an action plan

3. The declaration on principles for international statistics (see box 1) contains a set of useful practices to implement the principles, some of which are imbedded in the other pillars of the international statistical system listed above. The CCSA has already agreed in principle on proposals for developing common tools and initiatives to help international organisations (IOs) in the

implementation of these principles, to improve the overall quality of international statistics and bilateral and multilateral co-operation and co-ordination.

4. As far as *Memorandums of Understanding* are concerned, the following proposals are proposed:

- The CCSA could discuss at its September 2005 meeting on the opportunity of signing a “general” multilateral MoU among IOs about their future commitments to work in an integrated way<sup>1</sup>. This

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<sup>1</sup> The OECD and Eurostat have a similar agreement from which more detailed agreements have been signed on particular topics.

## **Good practices identified by the CCSA to implement the principles for international statistics**

### **Principle 1**

- Having regular consultations with key users both inside and outside the relevant organisation to ascertain that their needs are met
- Periodic reviewing of statistical programmes to ensure their relevance
- Compiling and disseminating of International Statistics based on impartiality
- Providing equal access to statistics for all users
- Ensuring free public accessibility of key statistics.

### **Principle 2**

- Using strictly professional considerations for decisions on methodology, terminology and data presentation
- Developing and using professional codes of conduct
- Making a clear distinction, in statistical publications, between statistical and analytical comments on the one hand and policy-prescriptive and advocacy comments on the other.

### **Principle 3**

- Making decisions about statistical work programmes publicly available
- Making documents for and reports of statistical meetings publicly available.

### **Principle 4**

- Aiming continuously to introduce methodological improvements and systems to manage and improve the quality of statistics
- Documenting the concepts, definitions and classifications, as well as data collection and processing procedures used and the quality assessments carried out and making this information publicly accessible
- Documenting how data are collected, processed and disseminated, including information about editing mechanisms applied to country data
- Giving credit, in the dissemination of International Statistics, to the original source and using agreed quotation standards when re-using statistics originally collected by others
- Making officially agreed standards publicly available

### **Principle 5**

- Facilitating the provision of data by countries
- Working systematically on the improvement of the timeliness of International Statistics
- Improving the quality of data received from countries using appropriate editing procedures and reporting to countries about detected errors
- Periodic reviewing of statistical programmes to minimise the burden on data providers
- Sharing collected data with other organisations and collecting data jointly where appropriate
- Contributing to an integrated presentation of statistical programmes, including data collection plans, thereby making gaps or overlaps clearly visible
- Ensuring that national statistical offices and other national organisations for official statistics are duly involved and advocating that the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics are applied when data are collected in countries.

### **Principle 6**

- Putting measures in place to prevent the direct or indirect disclosure of data on persons, households, businesses and other individual respondents
- Developing a framework describing methods and procedures to provide sets of anonymous micro-data for further analysis by bona fide researchers, maintaining the requirements of confidentiality.

### **Principle 7**

- Responding to perceived erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics
- Enhancing the use of statistics by developing educational material for important user groups.

### **Principle 8**

- Systematically involving national statistical offices and other national organisations for official statistics in the development of international statistical programmes, including the development and promulgation of methods, standards and good practices
- Ensuring that decisions on such standards are free from conflicts of interest, and are perceived to be so
- Advising countries on implementation issues concerning international standards
- Monitoring the implementation of agreed standards.

### **Principle 9**

- Designating one or more statistical units to implement statistical programmes, including one unit that coordinates the statistical work of the organisation and represents the organisation in international statistical meetings
- Participating in international statistical meetings and bilateral and multilateral consultations whenever necessary
- Working systematically towards agreements about common concepts, classifications, standards and methods
- Working systematically towards agreement on which series to consider as authoritative for each important set of statistics
- Coordinating technical cooperation activities with countries between donors and between different organisations in the national statistical system to avoid duplication of effort and to encourage complementarities and synergy.

### **Principle 10**

- Cooperating and sharing knowledge among international organisations and with countries and regions to further develop national and regional statistical systems
- Basing cooperation projects on user requirements, promoting full participation of the main stakeholders, taking account of local circumstances and stage of statistical development
- Empowering recipient national statistical systems and governments to take the lead
- Advocating the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in countries
- Setting cooperation projects within a balanced overall strategic framework for national development of official statistics
- Enhancing the professional level of statistical staff by encouraging them to attend training courses, to do analytical work, to publish scientific papers and to participate in seminars and conferences.

“multilateral” MoU could help some organisations in overcoming, at least partially, legal problems currently encountered in the discussion of principles.

- Develop, in the CCSA password-protected website, an area where bilateral and multilateral MoUs signed by IOs could be stored. This would help the development of new MoUs building on already existing experiences.

5. No additional initiatives in the context of the development of the international statistical system are required as far as *methodological recommendations* are concerned. There are already several working groups through which international standards are defined. They work under the guidance of the UN Statistical Commission, which also provide (together with other UN regional bodies) the necessary co-ordination. A comprehensive list of existing and planned methodological recommendations is provided on the UNSD website. The only action required by CCSA members is that of ensuring the necessary information to keep this list up to date.

6. The development of new *technical standards* under the auspices of the Standards for Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) initiative is an important step towards an agreed set of rules for data collection and sharing. In the approach envisaged by SDMX, the creation of “joint hubs” for the dissemination of data and metadata concerning specific subject matters should be encouraged. These hubs should be co-managed by IOs involved in the activity and international working groups dealing with that particular subject matter should oversee the development of registers for data and metadata collection and management (i.e. for external debt statistics, BIS UN, IMF, WB and OECD are co-operating to develop the joint hub and upload data and

metadata, while the Task-force on Financial Statistics has the responsibility for agreeing on metadata and presentational issues).

7. The CCSA could discuss at its next meeting the lessons learned from the SDMX initiative and governance issues related to the adoption of such approach to various statistical domains. In this respect, it would also be important to revise the existing classification of statistical activities adopted some year ago by the ACC, possibly building on the classification agreed by ECE, Eurostat and OECD for the preparation of the Integrated Presentation of statistical activities in the ECE region. In fact, the revised classification could be used to build registers and “key families” in the SDMX context and to identify the division of labour among international working groups in the implementation of standards developed by SDMX.

8. The results of the survey carried out by the UNSD on “open source” software developed by IOs should be discussed by the CCSA. A co-ordination group composed by people in charge of ICT activities in IOs could be created to evaluate possibilities for future co-operation.

9. As far as *quality assurance frameworks* are concerned, the following activities could be undertaken over the next few months:

- the development of a special section for international organisations in the UNSD web site on good practices to implement Fundamental Principles. The web site for IOs should contain the description of practices adopted by the latter to implement the principles agreed on by the CCSA. As for the site for national statistical offices, the description of IOs’ practices would be done on a voluntary base;
- the development of a Data Quality Framework for International Statistics (DQFIS). The framework could be built starting from IMF, Eurostat and OECD quality frameworks, as well as good practices identified in the principles. It should aim to help IOs to develop their own frameworks to evaluate and improve quality;
- once having adopted the DQFIS, IOs should be encouraged to report, on a voluntary basis, on how quality guidelines are followed. The final aim could be the development of a web site for International Data Dissemination Standards (IDDS), following the example of SDDS and GDDS. To prepare such site, an assessment of the experience made by Eurostat and ECB in the context of SDDS would be particularly helpful;
- the preparation of a second meeting on “Quality for International Organisations” should start in co-operation with Eurostat, who is organising its Q2006 conference. The second meeting for international organisations could be held back-to-back with the Eurostat meeting as was done at Wiesbaden in 2004.

10. Finally, to address the issue of *common training programmes* for statisticians working in IOs a survey could be launched in 2005 to evaluate needs and already existing initiatives within members of the CCSA. A report could be then presented at the next CCSA meeting.

### **3. Conclusions**

11. Given the agreement reached on the need of developing a more comprehensive strategy to improve international statistics, the CCSA now needs to agree on a small number of concrete actions. Specific and measurable targets over the next three years *to develop a reinforced international statistical system* should be

identified. In order to promote and drive this process the role of the CCSA is fundamental and needs to be reinforced.

12. The activities envisaged in the previous section could be carried out by small Task Teams, each of which would work under the responsibility of a specific IO. The chairs of these teams should inform the chair of the CCSA and the other chairs on intermediate steps, in order to ensure good co-ordination of various activities and adherence to the timetable decided by the CCSA.