
CCSA's responsibility in the coordination of technical cooperation activities

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1. Background

The Statistical Commission at its 36th session reaffirmed the critical importance of statistical capacity-building, especially in the context of increased national and international demand for development information and stressed the need for technical cooperation to be demand-driven, responsive to local conditions, nationally owned and better coordinated. In this context, the Commission recommended that the Statistics Division, together with the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, carefully review what coordination mechanisms would be most suitable and effective.

The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, at its 5th session took note of the paper prepared by Paris 21 highlighting the need for improved coordination in the area of statistical capacity building, and requested that UNSD take the lead in the preparation of an issue paper on how CCSA can play a role in the coordination of technical cooperation activities.

This paper presents a few ideas of mechanisms to improve coordination among CCSA members and possibly other multilateral and bilateral donors, in developing and implementing statistical capacity building programmes in countries. Technical cooperation in statistics, in this paper, refers to activities carried out to assist countries in building their capacity in the production and effective use of statistics.

2. Issues and challenges in coordination among agencies

An important prerequisite for effective coordination is a coherent organizing framework. Some examples of effective framework are the national statistical development strategy promoted by Paris 21 and the World Bank Statistical Master Plan.

Ideally, technical assistance activities should be coordinated starting at their planning stage all the way to the implementation and evaluation stages – including establishing and agreeing on measurable targets and specific deliverable outputs. The coordination mechanism should be structured around specific themes/efforts and regional/geographical groupings.

Where coordination has been effective—examples are the 2010 round of population census programme, technical assistance to countries to implement SNA, the development of indicators and MDGs—one or more agencies have played a leading role depending on the substantive area.

Donors need to be fully involved in the coordination exercise and that should include bilateral donors. It is also important to coordinate within countries and include both donors (bilateral and multilateral) and implementing agencies. This would avoid multiple activities within the same area of work, often with conflicting approaches and guidelines.

Statistics are crucial to the successful formulation and implementation of policies in all areas. It is crucial to integrate technical cooperation programmes in statistics in the overall context of technical assistance in all other relevant sectors. A very good framework to help set clear objectives and integrate the different components is provided by PRS and PRS monitoring systems. For instance, donors and several agencies are coordinating around PRS in the PRS-monitoring group established by DFID, where national development agencies and international agencies exchange ideas and information and coordinate activities related to PRS monitoring systems. However, this is only one of few efforts in the mainstreaming of statistical development in the PRS process and monitoring. Much remains to be done to fully integrate the statistical component into poverty reduction strategies, improve the involvement of national statistical offices and transform PRS into an evidence-based framework.

Regional and sub-regional institutions should be fully involved in the coordination of technical assistance activities and in establishing networks for communication and cooperation among countries in the region. This role can be played effectively by regional commissions, regional banks and other regional institutions such as ECOWAS and SADC secretariats. This would also facilitate a regional and sub-regional approach to statistical capacity-building programmes and help promote intra-regional cooperation and exchange of practical experiences relevant to the local socio-economic context.

An important aspect of coordination in statistical capacity building is that activities need to be coordinated around substantive programmes with the involvement of the agencies responsible for the substantive areas to ensure that standards and methods consistent with international guidelines be promoted and used. An example is represented by training programmes on MDG Indicators, conducted with the input of all partner agencies to ensure that concepts and methods are fully consistent with recommendations and guidelines issued by the relevant agencies.

2.1 Some challenges in establishing a mechanism for coordination

Coordination needs to happen at different levels and include all parties involved: funding agencies, bilateral donors and executing agencies. While there are several fora where international agencies can interact, exchange information and establish mechanisms for coordination, it is more difficult to regularly keep the bilateral donors involved.

Agencies deal with different national counterparts. Central statistical agencies such as UNSD and Statistics Divisions in Regional Commissions and some agencies—such as ILO—generally work directly with National Statistical Offices. Some specialized agencies relate mainly to line ministries in their area of expertise (for instance, WHO with Health Ministries, UNESCO with Education Ministries, etc.).

Many activities originate directly from agencies' country and/or regional offices: UNDP often works directly from their country offices with National Statistical Offices, line ministries etc.; the World Bank also often works directly from regional or country offices.

Some executing agencies design and implement their own data collection programmes—international data collections such as MICS, WHS, LSMS, etc.

3. Ideas for possible mechanisms of coordination

Some options to be considered for discussion are presented below:

- a. A mechanism to compile information on ongoing and planned activities, built around specific statistical programmes/fields. Collecting information and/or maintaining databases of on-going or completed projects have generally not proved effective unless built around specific programmes, with some lead agencies responsible for maintaining the database. The International Household Surveys Network (IHSN) is a good example of an effective mechanism to compile information on existing international efforts. However, it is mainly focused on international activities and does not allow coordination within countries. Groups similar to the IHSN could be formed around the various areas of work within the domain of CCSA. Each group would have a lead agency responsible for maintaining and managing the information flow and would include all agencies whose work is relevant to the specific area. Agencies would be encouraged to report information on planned and on-going programmes.
- b. Agencies could report regularly on their programmes and activities in capacity building to CCSA members. This could be organized around substantive areas—with members reporting to one or more members responsible for the specific substantive area—and/or on a regional basis.
- c. Each CCSA member could merely make available a link to their existing internal reporting mechanisms that provide information on technical co-operation activities. For instance, in the OECD context this could include an annual report prepared by the Centre for Co-ordination of Non Members (CCNM) or parts of the OECD Statistical Work Programme (OSWP). Some mechanism could perhaps be found to organise these around the themes/geographic groupings referred to in Section 2 and in the bullet point above.
- d. No elaborate ongoing reporting mechanism would be set up, but only a mechanism to address specific instances of duplication, etc., when they arise at the national and international levels.

Coordination mechanisms should include to the extent possible, bilateral donor programmes.

One or half day could be set aside at each CCSA session for side events on programmatic areas, to exchange information on capacity building.