
CCSA Note on Principles Governing International Statistical Activities

Prepared by UNSD

1. The agreement among international agencies on the “Principles Governing International Statistical Activities”, the spirit of which was very much determined by the ‘Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics’ for countries, may be considered a key achievement of the CCSA in its work towards better coordination of all international statistical work. These principles acknowledge explicitly that there exists the same degree of accountability for international organizations when it comes to statistical activities. The public endorsement of the principles on the UNSD website reflects the commitment of the CCSA members to live up to the standards that were set.

2. The common challenge now is to implement the principles in practice. This was recognized by the Statistical Commission at its 2006 session: The Commission “welcomed with appreciation the principles”, and “requested CCSA to (i) assess the implementation of the principles by organizations and report the results of the assessment to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session (2008); (ii) include in the preamble of the principles the description of the role of international organizations in the global statistical system and expand the best practices associated with the principles, in particular principle 6; (iii) extend the adoption of the principles to the sub-regional organizations.”¹

3. With respect to the additions requested by the Statistical Commission (in the preamble and for the best practices associated with principles), UNSD is currently elaborating some proposals for the group. The purpose of this note is to present some proposals for possible ‘implementation arrangements’, to serve as a basis for the discussion at the CCSA meeting. The meeting is then invited to agree on a set of implementation arrangements, in order to lay the foundations for the report requested by the Statistical Commission for 2008.

Implementation of the Principles

4. The discussion of the implementation of the principles is structured in four parts below. (i) As a first step, an assessment of the current situation in the various international organizations will have to be made. Different mechanisms are being proposed. (ii) Once an assessment has led to the conclusion that a specific principle is not being observed by a specific agency, reconciliation procedures need to be put in place. (iii) The implementation of specific principles is already underway through a number of special projects by CCSA. Those are

¹ ECOSOC Official Records 2006, Supplement No. 4, Statistical Commission, Report of the thirty-seventh session, Chapter I.C. Decision 37/110, page 13.

presented in this part. (iv) An important element of the implementation strategy is the further dissemination of the principles.

A) Mechanisms of assessment of the current situation:

5. In principle there are three possible ways of assessing the current situation with respect to the principles for a specific agency: (i) self-assessment, (ii) country-assessment or (iii) peer reviews.

6. CCSA had already discussed the need for self-assessment: In its sixth meeting in Rome (September 2005) “the Committee decided that agencies should review their current practices in relation to these principles and disseminate the results of the review. The ‘principles and practices’ will be posted on the UNSD website on good statistical practices, including related information on its use by CCSA members based on extracts from other agencies websites”. To follow through with this decision it is proposed that each agency write by the end of November 2006 a short 3-5 page statement on the practices followed by their institution in relation to the principles and that these statements be posted on both the agency and the CCSA website.

7. In order to solicit country-assessments, UNSD as the secretariat of CCSA could send a letter and/or questionnaire to countries encouraging them to evaluate which principles, in their view, need most attention. Furthermore, member states could be asked to bring examples of ‘non-compliance’ to the attention of CCSA. At a first stage it may be sufficient to solicit the views of a cross-section of countries, in which case the 24 members of the Statistical Commission could serve as the appropriate sample.

8. A mechanism of regular peer-reviews could be established. On a voluntary basis an agency could submit its practices for review by another member (other members) of the CCSA. To start this initiative, it is suggested that 2-3 volunteers be sought for a first round of peer-reviews during the 2006/2007 period. Based on the analysis of the practicalities of these pilot peer reviews, the CCSA session in September 2007 may then recommend a more systematic schedule of peer reviews.

B) Reconciliation mechanism:

9. Any of the above forms of assessment might lead to the conclusion that a specific member of the CCSA does not follow one (or more) of the principles in its statistical activities. As a first remedy, the agency in question should be encouraged – as part of its self assessment statement - to acknowledge the non-compliance, state the reasons for it and describe what possible future actions are planned to address the situation. Furthermore, it is proposed that the CCSA will put the review of the status of the implementation of the principles as a standing agenda item on its fall agenda. It is not suggested that these reviews should be conducted systematically by principle or by agency. It would seem more practical and constructive if the CCSA would consider specific issues related to compliance, which have surfaced as a consequence of one the assessment methods. This includes the identification, and possibly the establishment of an inventory, of ‘good’ practices. In the case of serious discrepancies among the views of the members of the CCSA, it may be necessary to bring specific cases of non-

compliance to the attention of the higher level bodies, i.e. the Statistical Commission or the Chief Executive Board (CEB).

C) Common initiatives to implement specific principles:

10. Some of the principles clearly address core issues of effective coordination among international agencies. Therefore, concerted action among the key players will be needed. At its sixth meeting in Rome (September 2005) the CCSA had already identified three priority areas for action, which are (i) Development of quality assurance frameworks, (ii) the SDMX and (iii) Training initiatives for staff of international organizations. All of these issues are being addressed under separate agenda items during this CCSA session.

11. Additional common projects for CCSA in the spirit of implementing the principles could include: (1) development of a professional code of conduct for international statisticians (2) compilation of a set of best practices on 'user dialogue' for international data collection exercises, (3) a metadata project with the objective to systematically document and publicize all data editing procedures (including estimation techniques) (4) compilation of an integrated presentation of data collection plans, which would allow for the analysis of overlaps and potential gaps.

D) Further dissemination of the principles:

12. An important step in the early stages of any efforts towards implementing the principles, is to further publicize them, both within the CCSA member agencies as well as outside. Among the CCSA member agencies, special efforts should be made to formally bring the principles to the attention of senior management. Ideally, the principles should be ratified/endorsed by higher policy making organs in the various institutions. It is suggested that all CCSA members include in their 3-5 pages statement on their implementation practices (see section A. above) a reference regarding the extent to which their respective senior management has been engaged. Furthermore, in the high level inter-agency arena UNSD will formally bring the principles to the attention of the High Level Committee on Programme (HLCP) of CEB.

13. According to the request by the Statistical Commission the adoption of the principles should be extended to the sub-regional level. In this context it is suggested that each Regional Commission prepare by November 2006 a suggested list of relevant sub-regional organizations, with an active programme in statistics to whom a letter by the Director of UNSD should be sent, inviting them to commit to the principles. The letters of commitment will be added to the UNSD website.

14. In addition to these well targeted efforts to further disseminate the principles, other initiatives should be taken by all CCSA members to publicize the principles. A first step in this direction is for all CCSA members to post the principles on their respective websites. Furthermore, the printing of a special flyer for the principles could be envisaged, which could be disseminated widely at various international statistical events. CCSA members are invited to make further proposals for the dissemination of the principles.