

Discussion Note¹ on Regional Statistical Training

CCSA – Task Team 2 – Technical cooperation

The following Terms of Reference were discussed and agreed among the members of Task Team 2:

- Compile an inventory of existing regional training centers, programs and activities.
- Review functions and effectiveness of existing regional statistical training activities.
- Formulate recommendations to CCSA on ways to improve delivery of regional training in official statistics;

Concept of Regional Training

There is no water-tight definition of what constitutes “regional training in official statistics”; it generally refers to organized activities, events or programmes with the purpose of strengthening official statistical capacity, targeting a group of countries. The motivations for a regional (rather than a national) approach to statistical training are manifold, but the two key elements are the following:

- participating countries often share a common language and culture; furthermore they are mostly of a comparable level of socio-economic and, thus, statistical development. This allows for meaningful exchange of practical experiences as part of the training.
- a regional approach is attractive for the provider of statistical training as it allows for multiplier effects e.g. in the dissemination of global statistical standards.

There is a large variety of types of regional statistical training. They include:

- (i) academic institutions (e.g. Makerere University, USA Joint Programme in Statistical Methodology) offering special statistical programmes,
- (ii) specialized professional institutions (such as UN-SIAP, Munich Center, TES)
- (iii) training centers of global institutions offering – among other topics - statistical programmes (IMF, ILO, FAO)

¹ This note was prepared by UNSD, and primarily reflects its views. Due to the late preparation of this note, it could not adequately take into account the views of the team partners (FAO, ILO, Paris21) to the extent it could and should have. It is still hoped that this note may serve CCSA as an useful discussion basis, especially to decide what further work this, or other task teams on technical cooperation should consider.

- (iv) ad hoc training courses at the regional/sub-regional level, offered by global, regional and sometimes national institutions.

1. Inventory

The purpose of an inventory of regional training in statistics would be to serve (i) as reference and (ii) as analysis tool to identify potential duplications and/or under-covered regions and subject matter areas.

As mentioned above such an inventory could be potentially large. The listing of training institutions prepared by the Paris21 Task Team on training and published on the website currently contains 48 entries. A basic distinction must be drawn between long term training (universities, training centers) and short term training (on-the-job, workshops). It would be desirable for an inventory to include the following information elements:

- Basic type of training (degree, diploma, short course)
- Frequency (regular, ad-hoc)
- Level of trainees (professionals, service staff, users, all)
- Regional coverage
- Subject matter coverage
- Source of sponsorship/ownership (international organization, regional organization, country)
- Contact information

UNSD has started to compile information on regional training using some of the elements above (see attached table). Guidance is sought by CCSA on the usefulness of the classification suggested above. It is then proposed that in cooperation with task team 3, the inventory is completed and made available on the CCSA website.

2. Functions and effectiveness of regional training

Attempts to assess effectiveness/impact of any statistical training activity are notoriously difficult. Traditional measures are usually rather “input” measures (budgets, number of persons trained etc.) than “output” measures (new statistical infrastructure, new series compiled, improvements of statistical quality).

Preliminary research has not yielded extensive or detailed information on how the various providers of training measure effectiveness and impact. UNSD recently has started modest attempts to capture medium term impact by sending a follow-up questionnaire 12 months after a specific training event, including questions as to whether what was learned could actually be applied at the country level. IMF has published a rather comprehensive assessment of its regional training centers [reference], which include statistical training activities.

The questions one would like to answer are (i) Under what circumstances is regional training cost effective (compared to national/global training)? (ii) Is there an ideal size (i.e. ideal number of countries) for regional training? (iii) Are there topics more/less suited for regional training? (iv) Are there training demands that are under-covered? (e.g. for specific statistical topics).

The compilation of the inventory will allow analysis regarding some of these questions.

3. Recommendations on improved delivery of regional training

Whilst the task team has certainly not yet reached the point of making specific recommendations to CCSA, from the preliminary compilation of materials regarding regional statistical training it is already apparent that there in principle there are two broad areas of possible recommendations:

- (i) Improved effectiveness of the current infra-structure of regional training.
This refers on the one hand to the improvement of individual programmes as well as the inter-play between existing programmes. As the recent Kampala meeting of the Paris21 Task Team on Training re-emphasized, regional training to be effective needs to respond to national needs for training. A more systematic assessment of national needs, based on formulated national strategies for the development of statistics may yield a clearer picture, as to in which areas regional training activities could be most effective. Furthermore, there seems to be room for improvements on how the various regional training activities are related to each other. Possible synergies could be explored through the sharing of staff or of training materials. The World Bank e-learning initiative goes into the direction of capitalizing on and sharing of positive learning experiences.
- (ii) Expanding the existing infra-structure of regional training.
This refers not only to possibly extending both the subject matter and the geographical coverage of regional training, but would also include proposals for new forms of delivery; one promising idea in this context is the opening of existing national training institutions to ‘neighboring countries’. Using the practical experience of national statistical institutions as a starting point for a sub-regional training programme could prove cost-effective and sustainable. Targeted international support could focus on the provision of resource persons and on facilitating the exchange of training materials. The concept could be summarized as creating and promoting an “informal network of centers of excellence”.

In the context of the assessment of work of all task-teams on technical cooperation, comments on the above proposals are sought by CCSA.