

SOCIAL STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

Development and co-ordination of social statistics and indicators, including statistics and indicators on special population groups

Report prepared by the United Nations Statistical Office

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I. WORK ON THE FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL, DEMOGRAPHIC AND RELATED STATISTICS (FSDS)	

The United Nations Handbook on Social Indicators was issued in February 1989 (Series F, No. 49). As reported to the Sub-committee at its last session, the Handbook provides a reasonably complete presentation of the United Nations framework for integration of social, demographic and related economic statistics and extensive illustrations of basic series and methods for indicators in most of the main social and related economic fields. It also considers the development, use and application of indicators in developing and least developed countries. As a review of the basic organization and content of FSDS and social indicators, it thus supersedes, for all practical purposes, the preliminary guidelines on social indicators issued in 1978.

However, the Handbook is not intended to provide a comprehensive review of all the fields of social statistics. Its purpose is to present a framework for integration based on the main topics in each field, sufficient to provide a sound statistical basis for social indicators and for integrated and harmonized social series for general planning and monitoring purposes. Neither does it provide official international guidelines or recommendations on social indicators. It uses the general framework for integration approved by the Statistical Commission in connection with the preliminary guidelines on social indicators and draws extensively on established international statistical recommendations in all relevant fields to fill in the framework. It is meant to encourage further work in integrated social statistics and indicators by promoting a more harmonized and co-ordinated but flexible approach, within which many different interests, priorities and objectives can be accommodated and developed. In this connection, the Statistical Commission at its last session stressed the need to avoid overlapping or inconsistent methodologies and data compilation efforts and to promote international comparability. It noted that as demands for and uses of indicators were multiplying rapidly, for example in connection with special population groups and the measurement of poverty, it was essential to maintain a strong co-ordinating framework within which series and indicators for a wide range of uses and users could be developed on a cost-effective basis (para. 135 of its report).

II. STATISTICS AND INDICATORS ON WOMEN, ON DISABLED PERSONS AND ON AGING

The initial versions of both the United Nations Women's Indicators and Statistics Data Base (WISTAT) and the United Nations Disability Statistics Data Base (DISTAT) were completed for public dissemination on diskettes in mid-1988. Both were prepared in Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheets because of the spreadsheet's flexibility and ease of use in organizing a wide range of heterogeneous input data, and its ease of use and widespread acceptance by users. In DISTAT a fairly good degree of harmonization and integration of the spreadsheets was achieved allowing for relatively automated movement, recombination and extraction of data among the spreadsheets. The underlying data in WISTAT, however, were much too complex to readily allow any automation in these processes, which must now be done by "manual" manipulation of the files.

Analysis of the WISTAT files indicated that a feasible software to achieve an integrated data base from these data, with full control over footnotes, metadata, sources and references, as well as hierarchial column headings (up to six levels in WISTAT), was the Pick operating system. A Pick prototype version data base has been prepared for internal use in the Statistical Office, to be installed this summer, and has the additional advantage of allowing multiple users in a network (six comfortably on inexpensive equipment), an important consideration where regular file maintenance and referencing are undertaken by more than one person.

As reported to the Sub-committee at its last session, WISTAT consists of several hundred series in about 70 microcomputer spreadsheet files. These fit on 22 360 kb diskettes and total about 12 mb. The spreadsheet series are extracted and recombined to generate tables and indicators using standard microcomputer spreadsheet techniques. The diskettes were made available for official dissemination as copyrighted machine-readable products in July of last year. Pending publication of the WISTAT user's guide later this year, the diskettes are distributed with the draft annexes to the user's guide, which document the sources and organization of the series and the contents of the files.

The Disability Statistics Data Base (DISTAT) comprises statistics for 55 countries and areas and like the women's data base, is organized in microcomputer spreadsheet files. It uses FSDS and the WHO classification of impairments and disabilities as the organizing and classifying frameworks. However, since the data were entered entirely by the Statistical Office from primary sources using a pre-established design, this data base is substantially more integrated than the women's data base, though it still relies on the spreadsheet approach. It consists on 23 spreadsheet files totalling about 3.5 mb and is contained on 13 diskettes. Documentation for DISTAT has been issued as a sales publication, United Nations Disability Statistics Data Base, 1975-1986: Technical Manual (Series Y, No. 3).

Extensive attention has also been given to preparation of photo-ready tables and text for publication from these data bases. An initial evaluation indicated the Ventura version 1 was not capable of handling the large tables common to Statistical Office publications. Thus the Compendium of Statistics and Indicators on the Situation of Women 1986 (Series K, No. 5) was produced entirely with Lotus Manuscript Version 2 with a standard laser printer, and a compendium of statistics from DISTAT is now in preparation. There is now some indication that Ventura version 2, used with the Ventura "Professional Extension", might do a better job of handling large tables than Lotus Manuscript, but this has not yet been tried. There is also a new Lotus 1-2-3 "add-in", Allways, which produces well-formatted tables with good typography very much more easily than Manuscript or Ventura, from 1-2-3 spreadsheets. This has been tested with very promising results but not yet used for publications.

Other Statistical Office work on statistics and indicators on women in 1989/90 is concentrating on concepts, methods and experimental compilation of statistics on women in the informal sector and women's contribution to development using the SNA framework (see E/CN.3/1989.12), following up the Statistical Office/INSTRAW expert group meeting on this subject in the fall of 1986 and the relevant recommendations of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies.

In January of this year, the Statistical Office began a project to prepare a new publication, "Women and Social Trends, 1988" (working title). This project has been undertaken in co-operation with and is being supported by the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, CSDHA, INSTRAW, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women. A prospectus for the publication was prepared last summer by a consultant on the

basis of extensive discussions with these sponsoring agencies and with international statistical services in Geneva, New York, Rome and Vienna.

The main objective of the publication is to present a statistical assessment of the situation of women in terms of the active role which they play in the development of their nation and its social life as well as their movement to full equality, which in turn enables their full participation. It will highlight the gains which have been made during the years following the proclamation of the decade for women while at the same time taking account of the negative movements and obstacles encountered over the period, and will analyse statistics and indicators of economic, social and cultural conditions, identifying as far as possible gender-based differentials. The publication will be presented in a format designed to improve the understanding of the relationship between the objectives of the Decade and the Forward-Looking Strategies, highlighting such data as may provide measurements of success or otherwise of the achievements and will be about 150 pages long. Statistics for the publication are being drawn from WISTAT, supplemented as feasible by special studies by consultants and new material as available from the co-operating user agencies and international statistical services. The manuscript is to be completed this year for release in the first quarter of next year.

Consideration is also being given to developing this format into an annual publication on social trends, resources permitting, which could vary in its main focus from year to year but also attempt to provide for non-specialists a global overview of main indicators and trends in the social and related fields.

In other work on disability statistics, the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons recommended the collection and dissemination of disability statistics in population censuses and household surveys and their dissemination. The Statistical Office of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs has been urged, together with other units of the Secretariat, the specialized agencies and regional commissions, to co-operate with developing countries in evolving a realistic and practical system of data collection based either on total enumeration or on representative samples, as may be appropriate. For this purpose, in addition to the work noted above, a technical report on the development of statistical concepts and methods on disability for household surveys was also published by the Statistical Office in 1988.^{1/} at its twenty-fifth session noted that there is a "great demand at the national and international levels for statistics on disabled persons and commended the work of the Statistical Office in the development of methodology and compilation. National experience had shown the value of population censuses and surveys for collecting these data and had demonstrated the cost-effectiveness of using, where feasible, one or two broad disability questions in the population census as a basis for designing and implementing a more in-depth survey."

There is increasing co-operation and collaboration between the regional commissions and the Statistical Office in the compilation and dissemination of disability statistics and in the development of concepts and methods and technical co-operation in activities related to disability statistics. In

1988, the first training workshop on the development of national micro-computer data bases on disability for population studies and development planning was conducted by the United Nations Department of Technical Co-operation for Development (DTCD) and the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, in collaboration with the United Nations Statistical Office. Substantive support from the Statistical Office is provided to DTCD in the organization of another workshop on "Census and Survey Methods for the Study of Disability" to take place in the fourth quarter of 1989. The World Health Organization and Economic Commission for Europe are also collaborating the workshop. The workshop will provide an opportunity for personnel from about 20 developing countries to study various analytical and statistical methods to objectively measure highly diversified perspectives on disablement including the strong link of disability studies with population aging and development planning.

The Statistical Office is further collaborating with the Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia in the development of disability statistics through its participation in the ESCWA Interagency Task Force on Disability, and through the implementation of a project in 1989 on "Technical Advisory Services to the Western Asia Countries for Development of Statistics of Disabled Persons".

In the field of statistics on aging, the Statistical Office and the World Health Organization have been collaborating since April 1988 to increase the availability and use of national statistics on aging and on disability for the formulation and implementation of national policies and programmes. The major sources of data for the implementation of this collaborative effort are the United Nations Demographic Yearbook Data Base, the United Nations Disability Statistics Data Base (DISTAT), the United Nations Women's Indicators and Statistics Data Base and the WHO Mortality Data Base.

Following discussions in April 1988, with WHO, the Statistical Office is to undertake the following work related to the issue of population aging, some jointly with WHO, subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources:

(a) A special topic on Population Aging in the 1989 Demographic Yearbook reviewing 40 years of national data collection in the United Nations system related to population aging;

(b) The production and dissemination of national health and demographic profiles for approximately 70 countries on microcomputer diskettes to interested users, provided extrabudgetary support for this work could be found;

1/ Development of Statistical Concepts and Methods on Disability for Household Surveys (United Nations publication, Sales No. 88.XVII.4);

(c) Conduct jointly with WHO regional training workshops based upon the production of the 70 country profiles to increase both discussion and use of the proposed national profiles on aging for planning purposes by Governments; and

(d) The preparation of a report to be published in the 1990 World Health Statistics Annual focused on health, disability and the demographic situation of elderly persons.

As reported to the Sub-committee at its last session, the Statistical Office began work on a general microcomputer social statistics data base in 1986 for the next Compendium of Social Statistics and Indicators and this was used for the working paper issued in September 1987, "Compilation of selected statistics and indicators on social policy and development issues". This data base was basically completed for internal use at the end of 1987 but production of the social compendium was postponed pending completion of the Compendium of Statistics and Indicators on the Situation of Women 1986. Both compendiums use the framework elaborated in the Handbook for the organization, compilation and selection of series and classifications.

A new round of updating for the social compendium is now in process, and it is hoped to complete the final tables for photo-composition this summer.