

PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION POLICY, INCLUDING
CO-ORDINATION OF STATISTICAL DATA BASES

Issues relating to publication and dissemination
policies and practices, including co-ordination of statistical data bases

Report prepared by the United Nations Statistical Office

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities, at its twenty-second session, decided to keep the item on review of publication and dissemination policy and practices in the provisional agenda for its twenty-third session, including review of guidelines on dissemination including secondary dissemination. This report describes recent experiences of the United Nations Statistical Offices and issues relating to publication and dissemination policies and practices.

II. FREE EXCHANGE OF DATA WITH AGENCIES

2. The United Nations Statistical Office has continued to exchange machine-readable data, free of charge, with other international statistical agencies, as reported in a paper to the previous meeting (SA/1988/4). The magnetic tapes and diskettes, from other agencies, are received on a regular basis and used as the immediate input to the compilation of statistical compendia.

3. On-line access to the statistical data bases proves to be an effective way of data exchange between international agencies. The COMTRADE (Commodity Trade Data Base), installed in 1986 in the New York Computing Service (NYCS), is now providing on-line service to the users in New York as well as to those linked through AVD (Alternate Voice/Data) communication line with Headquarters in New York, including United Nations offices and regional commissions in Geneva, Vienna, Bangkok, Santiago, Addis Ababa and Nairobi. COMTRADE, in Geneva, is being used extensively by agencies which have a communication link to the International Computing Centre. The present users include 10 from the member organizations of the ACC Sub-Committee and 4 from the governments of the Member States.

4. UNSIS (United Nations Statistical Information System) is now accessible, on-line, not only by the users at Headquarters, in New York, but also those in the United Nations offices and regional commissions linked via AVD lines with Headquarters. UNSIS now contains at least some statistical series from the following subject fields: energy statistics, industrial commodity production statistics, industrial production indices (country series), national accounts, population estimates, international trade, construction statistics and index numbers of consumer prices and produces and wholesale prices as well as selected statistical series from FAO, IMF, UNESCO, WTO, ILO, ICAO and the World Bank.

III. CORE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM DATA BASE FOR MAIN ECONOMIC
AND GLOBAL INDICATORS.

5. As recommended by the Sub-Committee at its twenty-second session, the United Nations Statistical Office is undertaking work on the development of a small prototype United Nations System data base for use in connection with an experimental on-line service. As an initial starting point, the Statistical Office is currently computerizing the annual publication of its World Statistics in Brief (Statistical Pocketbook) which contains about 40 basic statistical series for all Member States of the United Nations. This core data base would also include information on the computerized statistical series available from international statistical agencies in machine readable form which are included in the Inventory of Computerized Statistical Data Bases. This computerized World Statistics in Brief would facilitate providing users of international statistics with information on the sources of statistics as well as how to obtain the computerized data from the organizations producing such data. It would be the intention of the Office to provide copies of this data base for use by interested international organizations. The list of series in this publication is annexed. Some

indications of some priority series which could be added are provided as a basis for discussion. These additional series would not necessarily be included in the publication due to the limitation in size but would be available on diskettes as well as on-line.

IV. PRICE OF MAGNETIC TAPES

*For trade
it was a
doubling*

6. Prices of magnetic tapes charged to external users had not changed, except for minor changes, since 1 September 1984 until 1 January 1988 when a new price list was announced. The new price list reflects about a 10 per cent general increase of prices. These increases were needed to finance the increased cost of support services for providing data on magnetic tapes. Certain categories of users have continued to receive a discount. The government ministries of Member States receive a 40 per cent discount. Other not-for-profit bodies, including government-associated councils, boards and associations, as well as universities and research organizations, receive a 20 per cent discount. Service Bureaux, which provide access to their customers on a commercial basis are required to pay five times the standard price.

V. MICROFICHES

7. Many of the publications prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat are available on microfiche. In addition to international trade statistics, the major yearbooks of the Statistical Office and the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics (1947 to 1987) are now available in microfiche. The Monthly Bulletin of Statistics for the full year 1987 is available on microfiche for \$152.00 (silver) or \$133.00 (dizo).

VI. COMPUTER PRINTOUTS

8. From time to time, users request data in the form of computer printouts. These are usually prepared by the Statistical Office in response to ad hoc requests for special tabulations of available data from our data bases. Prices for this service have been developed largely on an ad hoc basis in each subject-matter area. In response to recommendations from the auditors, criteria for standard pricing of such printouts will be developed.

VII. DISSEMINATION OF DATA ON DISKETTE

9. Initial work of the Statistical Office, in 1984/85, to develop microcomputer data bases on women and youth was first reported to the Sub-Committee in 1986 (SA/1986/12 and SA/1986/15). At the end of 1987, data compilation, editing and updating were basically completed for comprehensive microcomputer data bases on women, disability and social statistics. The women's and disability data bases were issued for public dissemination in the summer of 1988. Complete documentation for the disability statistics data base (DISTAT) is contained in the United Nations Sales publication United Nations Disability Statistics Data Base, 1975-1986: Technical Manual (Series Y, No. 3). A comparable manual is being prepared for the women's statistics and indicators data base (WISTAT). Until it is issued, basic documentation is available in the form of an informal working paper. This documentation contains order forms for the data bases. Up to now it has not been possible to prepare the data bases in any form except Lotus 1-2-3/MS-DOS files on

5-1/4" (360 kb) diskettes for use on microcomputers. However, the United Nations Office at Vienna has converted the women's data base to Macintosh Excel files for its own use and reported there was no difficulty in this. The public price for each data base has been set at \$200, with a 50 per cent discount for institutions, non-profit organizations and students. Limited distribution, at no charge, is made within the United Nations system, but all requests must be made in writing so that the Statistical Office can maintain an accurate list of registered users. Thus far, the data bases are being distributed at a rate of about 10 each per month but at least 80 per cent of these are at no charge.

10. In addition, selected international trade statistics can be made available to users on diskette on request. In other fields, such as population statistics, national accounts statistics and industrial statistics work on the development of outputs in the form of diskettes is proceeding. It is anticipated that several such outputs will become available in the course of the next twelve months.

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VIII. ISSUES RELATED TO DISSEMINATION POLICIES

11. The existing guidelines on secondary dissemination of data in machine-readable form are as follows:

"(b) There should be no secondary dissemination of machine-readable statistics to a customer which is not an international organization where the statistics are in the form originally provided. Such requests should be referred back to the original providing organization;

(c) When the data provided have undergone a transformation, or have been combined with other data, the resultant machine-readable product may be sold to a customer which is not an international organization if the original providing organization(s) agree(s). The agreement should be reached on a product-by-product basis and cover the terms and conditions of the sale."

12. The above guidelines for the exchange and dissemination of data in machine-readable form were first agreed upon in 1979 when the provision of data on-line basis was not as active as today. Nevertheless, at its nineteenth session in 1985, the Sub-Committee agreed that the existing guidelines were sufficiently broad and generally applicable and no change in them was required. The general principle of the free exchange of statistical data on an inter-agency basis was considered to apply also to the provision of

data on a direct on-line basis so that, to the extent that an organization maintained for its own needs statistical data in a direct on-line data base, free access to those data but not computer processing should be permitted to other organizations (ACC/1985/15, para. 12).

13. As the on-line access facility to statistical data bases of international agencies has been developed and their scope expanded, some concern have been raised that the data provided from other agencies, for internal use, might be accessed not only by internal users but also by external users, who may or may not be international organizations.

14. While the Technical Working Group on Statistical Data Bases in its 1986 and 1988 meetings expressed its view that allowing on-line access to a wide range of users could contribute to the wider dissemination of statistics and raise the level of interest in the statistics being collected and disseminated by international organization, it also recognized that in the case of secondary dissemination of data, users might not be able to obtain adequate substantive assistance on the subject matter aspects of the data stored in the data base. Relating to this, is the identification or development of software for the display of meta data, a subject that the Sub-committee and the Working Group addressed in 1988.

15. Over and above the technical issues considered by the Working Group, a variety of policy issues also arise. For example, if one or more international organizations provide on-line access to the data provided from other international organizations to outside customers (e.g., Member States, non-profit research institutions, private sector users or commercial on-line

data bases), the potential income from the sale of the same data by the originating agencies may be significantly reduced. As a result of this loss of resource these agencies may find it difficult to maintain and improve their statistical processing and dissemination services. In the end this can result in the erosion of the quality of the basic data in the international statistical system.

16. The Sub-Committee may wish to discuss proposals for modifying the existing guidelines that would take into account such issues. With regard to the provision of meta data along with statistical data, no comprehensive solution appears to be available so far. Accordingly, it may be desirable to maintain the present dissemination policies for large and/or detailed basic data sets. For smaller data sets particularly those containing multi-sectoral summary series, the problem of meta data may not be as critical. In these cases, possible modifications to take into account cost issues include: (a) provision of lump sum or per use royalties paid by end users, (b) joint data bases with multiple dissemination nodes (the United Nations System data base proposed in paragraph 5 is an example of such an approach) or (c) royalty paid by distributing organization to originating organization. Naturally, other solutions may be possible. Alternatively, the Sub-committee may consider that the present guidelines may be continued since it already provides for negotiations on a case by case basis.

Annex

Series in World Statistics in Brief and comments on possible
additions to form a core United Nations system
data base for main social and related
economic indicators

Selected Series

Units

DEMOGRAPHY AND LABOUR FORCE

1. Total population	Millions
2. Age group 0-14	Per cent
3. Age group 60+	Per cent: Males/Females
4. Economically active population	Per cent: Males/Females
5. in agriculture	Per cent
6. in industry	Per cent
7. Urban population <u>d/</u>	Per cent
8. Annual population growth rate <u>a/</u>	Per cent
9. Life expectancy at birth <u>a/</u>	Years: Males/Females
10. Infant mortality rate <u>a/</u>	Per 1 000 births

Comments:

Population: show numbers by sex in each age group in order to permit recalculation and reaggregation as desired:-5, 5-14, 15-24, 25-44, 45-59, 60-69, 70+.

Labour force: (a) Show numbers by sex in each age group economically active and not economically active (so that total population can be derived); (b) Show numbers by sex economically active in grouped branches of industry, such as agriculture, industry and services, and by groups of occupations, such as professional/technical/managerial/administrative, clerical/sales/service, production; (c) Show numbers by sex as employees, own-account workers and unpaid family workers.

Urbanization: show numbers by sex urban, in selected cities over one million population and in localities 100,000 to 1,000,000 and one million and over.

Mortality: add maternal and under-5 mortality rates.

NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

11. Gross domestic product (GDP)	Million US\$
12. Annual growth rate of GDP <u>b/</u>	Per cent
13. Per capita GDP	US\$
14. Gross fixed capital formation	As per cent of GDP
15. Agriculture	As per cent of GDP
16. Total industrial activity	As per cent of GDP
17. Manufacturing	As per cent of GDP

Comments:

Add growth rates to all items. Add household income and expenditure, total output in education, health and defense, and total government consumption expenditure.

Selected Series

Units

AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY

- 18. Total agricultural production: Index numbers
1979-81= 100
- 19. Per capita food production: Index numbers
1979-81= 100
- 20. Industrial production: Index numbers
1980= 100
- 21. Commercial energy production
1000 MT oil equivalent

TRADE, FINANCE AND TOURISM

- 21. Imports Million US\$
- 22. Exports Million US\$
- 23. Consumer prices: Index numbers
1980=100
- 24. Wholesale prices: Index numbers
1980=100
- 25. Exchange rate
Nat'l currency per US\$
- 26. International reserves minus gold
Million US\$
- 27. Gold reserves
Mill fine troy ounces
- 28. Tourist arrivals
Thousands

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION

- 29. Motor vehicles in use
Number per 1 000 pop.
- 30. Telephones in use
Number per 1 000 pop.
- 31. TV receivers in use
Number per 1 000 pop.

EDUCATION, HEALTH AND NUTRITION

- 32. Illiteracy rate
Per cent: Males/Females
- 33. Enrolment ratio: 1st and 2nd levels
Per cent: Males/Females
- 34. Public expenditure on education
As per cent of GNP
- 35. Population per physician
Number
- 36. Food supply: Calories c/
Per capita per day

Comments:

Education and literacy: (a) Add illiteracy rates by age group 15-24, 25-44, 45-59 and 60+, urban and rural; (b) Add enrolment at third level and per 100,000 population, and enrolment growth rates at each level; (c) Add numbers participating in adult education and percentage at third level in selected groups of fields; (d) All figures by sex.

Health: (a) Delete population per physician and add mortality and life expectancy indicators from demographic; (b) Add available primary health care indicators including water and sanitation; (c) Add reported AIDS cases by sex.

Nutrition: Add five-yearly rates of change in calories per capita per day.

OTHER

Consider additional selected indicators on culture and on environment.

Consider adding a section on data sources including (a) Population and housing census dates, (b) Dates and main publications of national household surveys, (c) Dates of industrial and agricultural censuses, (d) Completeness of registration of births and deaths.

a/ Estimates prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations and refer to the years 1970-75, 1975-80 and 1980-85 respectively.

b/ Data refer to GDP in 1980 constant prices and are averages of 1970-75, 1975-80 and 1980-85.

c/ Data refer to 1974-76; 1979-81 and 1983-85 respectively.

d/ Estimates prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations and refer to the years 1975, 1980 and 1985 respectively.