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CO-ORDINATION OF TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION IN STATISTICS

Current issues and new developments in statistical training

Report prepared by the Statistical Office of the
United Nations Secretariat

Current issues and new developments in statistical training

1. One of the Commission documents on Technical Co-operation (E/CN.3/1989/17) dealt with current state of statistics and statistical development in developing countries. The document, while underscoring the overall increase of the capability of these countries during the recent past in producing reliable statistical data, maintained that the progress achieved by the countries was not of the same level. Among the reasons behind this, the continuing attrition of personnel trained in statistics and data processing was cited as a major cause. There is still a perennial shortage of eligible people in many statistical offices who may go for even short-term specialized training programmes. This persistent problem has long been well recognized and the Commission in its discussions agreed inter alia with the following statement (para 87) in the document:

Statistical training must continue to be emphasized as an essential component of technical co-operation in statistics. Indeed, it can be expected that training will remain a subject of long-term concern - not because of inadequacies in past training efforts but rather because of several chronic structural factors. First, in many countries, ¹regular academic programmes do not generate sufficient graduates with the mix of quantitative and subject-matter skills needed by national statistical services. Secondly, ²only relatively large countries can afford to develop statistical training institutes within or associated with the national statistical service. ³Thirdly, rapidly evolving technologies will continue to require that staff from most national statistical offices receive training if those offices are to benefit from the savings that result from the use of new technologies. The Commission endorsed the following strategy specifically related to the issue of statistical training noted in the document in continuation of the same paragraph:

In these circumstances, multilateral and bilateral technical ¹co-operation programmes in statistics need to plan for continued ²support for that area. Although the strengthening of national training capabilities can provide part of the long-term solution, regional and sub-regional co-operative endeavours will also have to be pursued ³since most smaller countries cannot be expected to be able to provide

specialized training in all aspects of statistics and statistical data processing.

2. Efforts have been strengthened in current technical co-operation projects for the development of statistical staff through training, particularly in-service training conducted in the national statistical offices. Educational authorities in most countries are now formally acknowledging certificates awarded upon successful completion of such courses. There are several such projects, either being implemented or impending. Also, almost every country project, including the NHSCP projects, are designed in a way as to offer maximum scope to the nationals for training, within the country and abroad.

3. In addition to the country projects, and the sub-regional projects such as the Pan-Arab programme for child development that includes training courses and workshops, there are several interregional and regional projects on statistical training that are benefitting a large group of countries, thus maximizing the use of available resources.

Mention may be made of the courses organized under the rouble component of the DTCD Regular Budget, the interregional project for training junior statisticians and programmers from one developing country in another promoting the theme of technical co-operation among developing countries (TCDC), the CIDA (Canada) funded project for census training in Sub-Saharan Africa, the interregional project on population census data base development and training, and the workshops and seminars on statistics and indicators on women, on disabled persons and on other special population groups.

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4. The Commission document proposed several strategies, including emphasis on statistical training, endeavouring to take a broad approach to the challenges of statistical development and technical co-operation. These strategies received full endorsement from the Commission. The statistical training programme that has been suggested in three countries, namely, Democratic Yemen, Oman and Qatar, has taken into account of the recommendations of the Commission. This will be pursued in other countries

too. The UN Statistical Office is giving re-newed emphasis on the dissemination of methodological materials and manuals for use by developing countries, as observed by the Commission. It is providing also full promotional and advisory support to the ISI project for producing video tapes for statistical training.

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5. This document describes the current activities to deal with the new issues. The Commission stressed on the effective co-ordination of technical co-operation activities, with implication for maximum utilization of available resources. The ACC Sub-Committee may wish to indicate additional measures that should be attempted to meet the current challenges in this complex task of statistical development through technical co-operation.