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CURRENT ISSUES IN TECHNICAL COOPERATION -
STATISTICAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Report prepared by the Bureau of Statistics
International Monetary Fund (IMF)

A major part of the work of the Bureau of Statistics of the IMF is an extensive program of technical assistance which was initiated some 20 years ago. The program aims at strengthening the capacity of national authorities to compile reliable statistics in those areas of economic and financial activity which are of particular interest to the Fund. In broad terms, the Bureau of Statistics provides technical assistance in the following areas: balance of payments statistics; money and banking statistics; general economy, including national accounts, price, and trade statistics; government finance, including local government, statistics; and international banking and external debt statistics.

While the form of assistance provided is tailored to the particular circumstances, in general it consists of one or more of the following elements: visits by staff of the Bureau of Statistics to the country in question, training of national statisticians at Fund headquarters either through courses offered at the IMF Institute or through specialized training in the Bureau of Statistics, and organization of, or participation in, seminars on particular areas of statistics.

Visits by Bureau of Statistics staff to countries are typically of about two weeks in length. The range of issues covered in these visits is quite varied and reflects the particular problems encountered in the country in question. Bureau staff advise on such issues as data collection, compilation procedures, methodology, classification, and data processing. Where appropriate, Bureau staff may be assisted by specialists in electronic data processing. In the event that follow-up work is required, further missions may be scheduled at appropriate intervals.

Since the inception of the program, about 70 visits annually have taken place, with the majority being targeted to developing countries. In addition, Bureau staff participate in regular IMF staff missions when statistical problems are of particular importance, and frequently provide technical assistance on particular topics during these missions. In general, visits by Bureau staff comprise one economist, although in cases

of exceptional complexity or involving more than one area of statistics a larger mission may be arranged.

Apart from the cooperation and training provided through country visits, a major element of the activities of the Bureau involves the teaching of statistical methodologies at courses organized by the IMF Institute. These courses are held on a regular schedule and are offered in English, French, and Spanish, on a rotating basis. At the present time courses are offered in balance of payments statistics, government finance statistics, and money and banking statistics.

External seminars have been organized by the Bureau of Statistics to provide training to national compilers in a number of areas. In recent years seminars have been held on balance of payments, government finance and money and banking statistics. In addition, Bureau staff have participated in regional seminars and have provided lecturing assistance on occasion.

At IMF headquarters, Bureau of Statistics staff provide training to a limited number of national statisticians each year. This training is specifically geared to the precise needs identified in each case. In general, however, it affords the opportunity for a national statistician to learn about the operations of the Bureau, to enhance his or her expertise in a particular area and to become familiar with the way in which national data are converted by the Bureau to conform to international standards.

The concept of international comparability of data is central to the work of the Bureau and to its various training activities. In order to ensure that data underlying new types of transactions in areas of interest to the Fund are capable of being transformed into internationally comparable formats, the Bureau continually refines and updates its statistical methodologies. To this end Bureau staff participate actively in international meetings in relevant areas of statistics. Moreover, the Fund has hosted a number of meetings covering pertinent statistical topics; including three expert group meetings organized in connection with the revision of the United Nations' A System of National Accounts.