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CO-ORDINATION OF TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION IN STATISTICS
CURRENT ISSUES IN TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION -
STATISTICAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Report prepared by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In this paper current issues and new developments in the field of statistical training and education in Africa will be discussed briefly.

II. THE STATISTICAL TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR AFRICA (STPA)

2. The STPA was adopted at the tenth session of the Conference of African Statisticians in October 1977 and was formally instituted by resolution 9 ECO (XVIII) of the ECA Executive Committee at its eighteenth session held in Khartoum (Republic of the Sudan) in 1978.

3. The main objective of the STPA is to ensure that the African region has a permanent supply of qualified statistical staff for the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and other organizations in the public as well as the private sector. The programme is co-ordinated by ECA at the regional level. Fifteen regional statistical training centres have been admitted to the programme. In addition, seven centres outside the African region are associated with the Programme. It should be noted that at its inception, STPA had twelve ordinary and one associate member. The associate STPA centres were to provide mainly short term training in the form of courses, seminars or workshops in specific applied statistics topics for serving statisticians. ✓

4. The STPA covers the following types and levels of training: professional level training leading to the first degree in statistics or equivalent; specialized and postgraduate level training and middle level training. The training of middle level staff was initially proposed to be conducted at the level of the countries leading to the diploma/certificate in statistics. In-service statistical training programmes organized at NSOs are part of the overall STPA programme.

5. For over ten years now, ECA, with funds provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has assisted STPA centres, national middle level training centres and NSOs in the implementation of their statistical training activities. ECA has also assisted in areas of general interest to all centres/countries. These include the development of guide syllabuses, provision of consultants to teach courses at STPA centres, provision of fellowships for training trainers, dissemination of information on statistical training and provision of equipment for teaching purposes to a limited number of centres who needed them. ECA, through its advisers and regular staff, has also undertaken to provide lectures in applied statistics topics to STPA centres, national middle level training centres and NSOs.

6. The EEC through the project "EEC assistance to STPA" has provided technical assistance and teaching equipment to centres, made twinning arrangements between some English-speaking training centres in Africa and centres in Europe, and organized seminars for producers and users of statistics. Other bilateral and multilateral donors have also provided assistance to the STPA centres, NSOs and national middle level training centres as requested by individual African Governments.

7. Through the STPA, it is expected that a large number of statistical and other staff in government ministries/departments, parastatal and private sector will receive formal education and training in statistics to enable them perform the tasks demanded of them.

III. CURRENT ISSUES AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS

8. Several issues have come up since the inception of the STPA. Among them are (i) underutilization of STPA centres; (ii) lack of accommodation facilities at some STPA centres; (iii) the development of in-service/middle level statistical training facilities at national level; (iv) special assistance to Portuguese-speaking African countries in the field of statistical training; (v) Post-graduate training and research at STPA centres; and teaching statistics in secondary schools.

9. In the area of underutilization of STPA centres, this has mainly been caused by lack of fellowships for the trainees. Ways of solving this problem have not yet been found. Donors and African Governments have to find ways of allocating fellowships to the full advantage of the existing STPA centres.

10. The problem of inadequate accommodation facilities has persisted at some of the STPA centres such as the Eastern Africa Statistical Training Centre (EASTC), Tanzania, and the Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (ISAE), Makerere University, Uganda. The creation of adequate and suitable facilities for training of students needs no further emphasis.

11. The development of in-service middle level training facilities at NSOs and middle level training centres at national level was recognized at the inception of the STPA. ECA however intensified its efforts in encouraging countries to develop these facilities beginning 1984. It should be mentioned that a number of countries are already implementing these programmes at the certificate or diploma level. These programmes have become a useful link to the STPA centres in terms of provision of trainees for higher level training. A number of countries however require funds and technical assistance to establish and maintain these programmes. ECA continues to provide support but donor assistance is urgently required to establish or strengthen or establish these programmes.

12. Special assistance to Portuguese-speaking African countries (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe) in the field of statistical training was recognized much earlier as one of the issues to be tackled. It should be recalled that these countries only got political independence in 1975. With assistance of the EEC and the Government of Portugal a professional statistical training centre will be established at the "Institut national supérieur de statistique appliquée" (INSSA) in Lisbon. This centre will cater for the training of professional statisticians of these countries. A series of meetings have been held involving the EEC, ECA, "Ecole nationale de la statistique et de l'administration économique (ENSAE)", France, "Institut national de la statistique", Spain, "Centre européen de formation des statisticiens économistes des pays en voie de développement" (CESD) and the "Institut national de statistique du Portugal" and representatives of the statistical offices of the five Portuguese-speaking African countries to work out modalities for this centre. At the same time a sub-regional middle level training centre has been agreed to be established in Bissau, Guinea Bissau to cater for the needs of Guinea Bissau; Cape Verde and Sao Tome and Principe. It has also been agreed that national statistical training centres should be established in Mozambique and Angola to cater for the needs of these countries. The EEC is providing assistance to the middle level statistical training centre in Bissau. The Mozambique and Angola centres are yet to receive support from donors. This assistance is needed urgently.

13. Training at postgraduate level and research have been some of the areas requiring support. Two STPA centres in the English-speaking and two in the French-speaking African countries were identified to be strengthened in the area of postgraduate level training. Although ECA continues to provide limited support, there is still a large demand to be met in terms of strengthening the programmes and the teaching staff and in some cases provision of training facilities such as building, microcomputers, etc. In the area of research, STPA centres require financial support to conduct research in applied statistics topics. This is because in some cases external inputs may be required and the foreign currency to purchase the equipment may not be available. Most of the centres tend to conduct theoretical research to lack of funds for applied research.

14. Statistics has been included as one of the subjects on the curriculum of secondary schools in some English-speaking African countries in West Africa. However this is not the case for the majority of other English-speaking and French-speaking countries in Africa. There is need to develop syllabuses for this level of teaching. There is also the need to introduce teaching of statistics at teacher training colleges and the development of appropriate textbooks in statistics for teaching purposes. Through teaching statistics at secondary schools a large number of people would be educated in the field of statistics. STPA needs to address this area.

IV. CONCLUSION

15. The STPA continues to aim at ensuring Africa's self-reliance in statistical manpower by increasing the number of trained statisticians and improving and maintaining the quality of the serving statistical staff. The issues which have been raised above continue to be addressed under the STPA and also at the biennial meetings of Directors of STPA centres and the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers. The continuing support of donors in resolving these problems will be needed.