

ACC SUB-COMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES
Twenty-fourth session
Vienna, 18-22 June 1990
Item 7 of the provisional agenda

SA/1990/10/Add.11
23 April 1990

CURRENT ISSUES IN TECHNICAL COOPERATION FOCUSING ON
BILATERAL AGENCIES AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Technical Assistance and Training

Report prepared by the International Monetary Fund

A major part of the work of the Bureau of Statistics of the IMF consists of 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 and report reliable statistics in those areas of economic and financial activity which are of particular interest to the Fund. The Bureau of Statistics provides technical assistance in the areas of balance of payments statistics, money and banking statistics, government finance statistics, and general macroeconomic statistics including national accounts, price, and trade statistics. In carrying out its technical assistance activities which consist of Fund staff missions and, beginning in 1990, also of placement of resident experts, the Fund pays particular attention to the coordination of this assistance with other international organizations.

While the form of assistance provided is tailored to the particular circumstances of the country concerned, 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 have usually been of about two weeks duration. The range of issues covered in these visits is quite varied and reflects the particular problems encountered in the country concerned in the statistical areas noted above. 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 visits may be scheduled at appropriate intervals.

In recent years, about 60 visits annually have been carried out, the majority of them to developing countries. Visits by Bureau staff usually comprise one economist, but in cases of exceptional complexity or involving more than one area of statistics a larger mission may be arranged. In addition, Bureau staff sometimes participate in regular IMF staff missions when statistical problems of particular importance have surfaced. A major element of the training activities of the Bureau of Statistics involves the teaching of its statistical methodologies in the areas of balance of payments, money and banking, and government finance statistics 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.

A major recent development concerns the initiation by the Bureau of Statistics of a program of longer term assistance in the statistical area, as a result of an arrangement entered into with the UNDP and the Japanese authorities. Under these arrangements, the Fund will be able to provide assistance in the form of the stationing of resident advisors/consultant for extended periods ranging from a few months to a year or longer. This program is at its early stage of development but the Bureau of Statistics expects to have several such projects under way in the remainder of 1990. An important aspect of the expanded program of technical assistance will be the need to coordinate closely with other multilateral agencies such as the UNDP, other UN agencies, Eurostat, and the World Bank, as well as bilateral providers of assistance to ensure close coordination and avoid duplication of effort.

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 to other international organizations.

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. It also affords the opportunity for a national statistician to learn about the statistical systems of the Fund, 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 of Statistics to conform to international standards.