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on Coordination

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REPORT OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES
ON ITS TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION

(Geneva, 6-10 April 1992)

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SUMMARY

1. The Subcommittee on Statistical Activities identified four matters to be brought to the attention of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. The first was the review of the structure and operation of the Global Statistical System, including its coordination, being carried out by the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination. As part of the review, the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat had prepared a working draft analysis of challenges and problems that are perceived by the Statistical Office for itself and, in its view, for the System as a whole and its proposals to meet those challenges in the four main areas of international statistical work: (a) statistical methods and standards; (b) data compilation, dissemination and technology; (c) technical cooperation and (d) coordination. A number of proposals had been developed based on this analysis. The report also included proposals aimed at initiating and furthering a process of change in the System overall. The general views of the Subcommittee are set out in paragraphs 7 to 16 and the specific suggestions in annex I. The second matter was action taken to further improve coordination of cooperation in statistical matters with countries in transition (paras. 23-25). The third matter was the initiatives taken on coordination in strategies for statistical development in Africa as reflected in the Strategy for the Implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s (paras. 28-29). The fourth matter was the plans of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to improve ways of collaboration with members of the Subcommittee on the statistical aspects of the Human Development Report (paras. 43-45).

2. The Subcommittee endorsed a draft policy position for consideration by the Statistical Commission on policies in the international organizations concerning adjusting nationally supplied data and making estimates for non-reported data. It also reviewed statistical implications of the single market of the European Economic Community (EEC); revision of the System of National Accounts; implications for technical cooperation in statistics of changes in UNDP and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) policies relating to project execution and agency support costs and the UNFPA Technical Support Services System; the International Comparison Programme; procedures for adopting joint international statistical standards among two or more organizations; international trade statistics; environment statistics; monitoring achievement of social goals; the base year for international statistics and preparations for the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission.

INTRODUCTION

3. The twenty-sixth session of the Subcommittee on Statistical Activities was held at Geneva from 6 to 10 April 1992. The agenda is contained in document SA/1992/1/Rev.1 and corresponds to the subheadings of chapter II of the present report. Twenty-six organizations were represented at the session.

4. The Subcommittee decided on an experimental basis (a) to increase the length of its meetings by one hour each day to allow full discussion of all items on the agenda and (b) to prepare a report on the session that was more focused on issues, decisions and agreements, which as a consequence was expected to be briefer than the reports on previous sessions which had attempted to more fully cover the wide range of views that were expressed during discussions of each agenda item.

I. MATTERS BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON COORDINATION

5. See paragraphs 1 and 2 above.

II. DISCUSSIONS AND DECISIONS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE

A. Review of the Global Statistical System and the evolving role of the statistical service in international organizations

6. The item was discussed on the basis of a draft report prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (SA/1992/2 and Add.1 and 2) and two background notes - one an extract from the report of the Statistical Commission's Working Group and the other a description of the Global Statistical System (draft). The Subcommittee expressed disappointment with the lateness of circulation of the draft report, which in many cases did not permit members of the Subcommittee to consult adequately with colleagues in their organizations. The deliberations on the item had been affected by this situation.

General discussion

7. The Director of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat outlined the background to the report and clarified that the final report would be a report of the Secretary-General from the United Nations viewpoint, that it was not being prepared in isolation, but had benefited from earlier consultations and would benefit further from the extensive planned discussion at the present meeting to make it define and address the issues as fully as possible. All agencies would have additional opportunities to express views at the Working Group session in June 1992 and the Statistical Commission in 1993.

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8. A number of suggestions were made for alternate structuring and content of the report. One suggestion was that it should address the following issues:

What is the Global Statistical System;

Why do we need it; who is served by it;

Has it worked; if not, why not;

What is the nature of the present crisis faced by it;

What are the challenges for the 1990s and the next century;

What are the strategic choices;

How can the system adjust to meet the challenges;

What should be cut;

What should be added;

How can the organization coordinate better;

Is there a need for a different distribution of labour;

How can mechanisms be changed to help organizations work better.

9. The suggestion was made that some of these issues should be addressed in the introduction.

10. Another suggestion called for an aggressive approach to the review, rethinking the system from basics. Another suggestion was that it be structured in terms of challenges and be more analytical. Another suggested structure involved:

Current situation and achievements;

Analysis of challenges and constraints;

Future proposals;

Approaches to implementing change.

11. There was general agreement that the report should be made more specific in describing the actions needed to meet the challenges and their implications, that it should be more analytical, the restraining effect of resource limitations should be emphasized, the interconnections among the various parts brought out more fully and the text shortened, in part, by the removal of citations and quotations from historical sources or their incorporation as annex material. It should also explicitly recognize the

issue that all organizations have intergovernmental bodies that take decisions governing their mandates, work programmes and resources.

12. Members of the Subcommittee provided comments and suggestions and raised questions relating to the individual chapters of the report and more broadly beyond the contents of the report; these are detailed in annex I.

13. During a further general discussion of prospects for implementation of any steps proposed, particularly any adjustment of existing organizational arrangements, the following points were made:

(a) The report should indicate that there are many fixed points/rigidities in the system such as mandates, resources, work programmes and existing intergovernmental review bodies; these tend to limit the scope and pace of change;

(b) An effort should be made to articulate broadly the principles and rationale in burden sharing.

14. In practical terms the approach would be to proceed subject by subject, with the involved agencies defining all the elements to be considered and investigating the possibilities and their implications. While the terms "centralization" and "decentralization" had been used in the report, their use should be reviewed and clarified.

15. The Director of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat invited all participants to provide any additional comments they might wish to make in writing by 30 April to allow the report to be finalized, translated and printed for the Working Group session starting 29 June 1992. He indicated that the Statistical Office would examine both the organization and the content of the paper in the light of the very constructive suggestions made during the course of the Subcommittee's discussion of this item and any written comments provided. In many cases the comments made all pointed in the same direction, in some cases the views expressed seemed to differ. The Statistical Office would need to assess how best to take the various views into account. Certainly, the overall aim would be to highlight the main issues and proposals and to identify and clarify the interrelationships among the various parts of the paper.

16. The Subcommittee agreed that the material in chapter II (of SA/1992/2) on adjustments and estimates should go forward to the Working Group and the Statistical Commission but the approach of including it in the present report was not appropriate. The best way of reporting on this question would be looked into by the Statistical Office as part of the process of revising the report.

B. Policies and practices in the international organizations concerning adjusting nationally supplied data and making estimates for non-reported data

17. The item was considered on the basis of chapter II of the draft report on the review of the Global Statistical System, prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (SA/1992/2), reports prepared by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (SA/1992/3) and an additional report by GATT (SA/1992/4).

18. Chapter II of report SA/1992/2 contained the following draft policy position for consideration by the Statistical Commission in relation to the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and those international organizations adjusting nationally reported data and preparing estimates for non-reported data and disseminating those data:

"The Statistical Commission might wish to consider endorsing the policy that the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and other international statistical organizations could: (a) collect and compile nationally reported data and also adjust national data where necessary to make them more compatible with international standards and prepare estimates for missing data such that the adjusted national data and estimates are seen as complementary to reported data; (b) include in their databases adjusted data and estimates prepared by other international organizations with competence in a particular field with full citations and notes to explain the sources, to avoid duplication of effort and proliferation of conflicting data; (c) maintain databases of reported data, and of adjusted data and estimates for missing data each appropriately identified; and (d) disseminate them to users or provide a system for informing users of the availability and nature of available adjusted and/or estimated data. Such a policy would require that the methodologies for making adjustments and estimates be methodologically sound and be described and that national authorities be informed generally that international statistical publications may contain adjustments relating to national data for international comparability purposes and estimates for missing data. At the same time, countries which had not reported data, or whose reported data had been adjusted, could be requested to provide comparable data if available."

19. The Subcommittee welcomed the reports of GATT (SA/1992/3, SA/1992/4), which described the practices of international organizations in relation to adjusting nationally reported data, mainly in international trade statistics, and stressed the need for international organizations to produce and publish internationally comparable data, and the report of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (SA/1992/3), which was aimed at broadening the consideration of the issue to serve the varying and sometimes conflicting needs and concerns of the involved international organizations, national statistical offices and users of international trade statistics.

20. The need for international organizations to prepare estimates for non-reported data and adjust reported data to prepare internationally comparable data and regional and world and other aggregates was recognized. The practices varied among organizations in respect of disseminating reported and adjusted data and estimates. There was agreement on the need for accepted methodologies to be used and for descriptions of them to be available to users. The potential for adverse country reaction to adjustments to their reported data and estimates for non-reported data was recognized, but experience of several of the organizations ranged from some to no objections. The question of notification to countries of the publication of the adjusted data and/or estimates in international sources and, in some cases, their clearance of those data was considered and the approaches of various organizations to the question were noted. While estimates and adjusted data were normally footnoted in the outputs of the primary producers, they sometimes were suppressed when used by secondary disseminators owing to technical difficulties or the nature of the secondary publications and as a result users were sometimes not clear about the status of some published data. The Subcommittee broadly endorsed the draft policy position.

C. Statistical implications of the single market
of the European Economic Community

21. The present item was discussed on the basis of a report by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) (SA/1992/5) on the evolution of the European Statistical System.

22. The Subcommittee welcomed the joint programme review process that had been adopted by EUROSTAT, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) to improve coordination of their statistical work and coordination with related international organizations. It noted that the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and some other international organizations were being associated with this process. It considered that it would be very helpful for coordination if EUROSTAT could keep all involved organizations aware of EUROSTAT's plans, especially in the early phases of plan formulation. In addition, the Subcommittee stressed the importance of EUROSTAT keeping other international organizations informed about the technical details of what it was doing in such fields as intra-community trade. The Subcommittee also invited EUROSTAT to outline its specific proposals on methodological development and ways in which it proposed to carry out such development and collaborate with other organizations and countries, particularly developing countries. The Subcommittee invited EUROSTAT to set out, prior to the meeting of the Statistical Commission's Working Group, in June 1992, its views on international statistical cooperation and the role of EUROSTAT in the global statistical system.

D. Statistical implications of developments in transition countries

23. The item was discussed on the basis of a report by EUROSTAT (SA/1992/6) on the operational framework for statistical cooperation with countries in transition, which was an abbreviated version of a document submitted to the EUROSTAT Working Group on Statistical Coordination with Central and Eastern European Countries and an oral report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the newly formed Steering Committee on Technical Assistance in Statistics to the countries of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

24. Several organizations described the technical cooperation activities they were engaged in with the transition countries and coordination arrangements (IMF, EUROSTAT, World Bank, ECE, OECD, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat). In addition to the EUROSTAT Working Group on Statistical Coordination with Central and Eastern European Countries and the IMF-led efforts covering the countries of the former USSR, the following specific coordination bodies and activities were mentioned: the ECE Newsletter and Steering Document, the EUROSTAT database on assistance activities in Central and Eastern European countries and the Intersecretariat Group on Statistical Cooperation with Eastern and Central European Countries, for which EUROSTAT provided the secretariat. The Subcommittee requested EUROSTAT to clarify the relationship between its Working Group on Statistical Coordination with Central and Eastern European Countries and the Intersecretariat Group that had been previously established covering the same countries. The Subcommittee noted that there were countries in transition in other regions of the world and their needs also had to be taken into account and assistance coordinated. ESCAP informed the Subcommittee that several republics of the former USSR were joining ESCAP and suggested that ESCAP should be included in the above-mentioned Steering Committee on Technical Assistance in Statistics to the countries of the former USSR. The Subcommittee also noted that current international efforts in transition countries were largely addressing economic statistics and that coordinated attention to social statistics was also needed.

25. The Subcommittee welcomed the information presented on the activities and their coordination and stressed that coordination at an early stage in all these initiatives was vital. The Subcommittee requested those organizations with a leading role to keep other organizations informed of major developments and of scheduled coordination meetings during the year. It also requested four reports for its twenty-seventh session: one from EUROSTAT on the work it was coordinating on the Central and Eastern European countries, including the work of other organizations in the Intersecretariat Group; one from IMF in relation to its initiatives and coordination activity in relation to the countries of the former USSR; one from ESCAP and the World Bank on cooperation with transition countries in regions outside Europe; and one from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) on the needs and activities and related coordination issues with respect to the

social sectors. In each case, the proposed authors were requested to involve other organizations that might be engaged in similar activities. The Subcommittee decided that this item would be a point for substantive discussion at its twenty-seventh session.

E. Revision of the System of National Accounts (SNA)

26. The item was discussed on the basis of an oral report by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat prepared in cooperation with Ms. C. Carson, who had been appointed by the Statistical Commission to work with the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (IWGNA).

27. The report covered progress since June 1991 on the revision of the SNA, including drafting and translation of chapters and annexes, technical group meetings, work on related handbooks, and the preparations for the sixth expert group meeting and for the interregional meeting scheduled for October 1992. The Subcommittee took note of the report and the fact that the revision process was being closely monitored to avoid any delay in meeting the timetable set by the Statistical Commission to ensure the adoption of the revised SNA by the Commission in 1993.

F. Coordination issues involved in strategies for statistical development in Africa

28. The item was discussed on the basis of a report prepared by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (SA/1992/7) on the Strategy for the Implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s, particularly outlining the coordination requirements. The Strategy takes account of all relevant initiatives for providing support for statistical capacity-building in Africa. These include, among the recent ones, the STATCAP initiative of the World Bank and the AFRISTAT programme being developed by France in collaboration with the Franc zone countries in Africa. The Strategy includes mechanisms for coordination, which is of central importance to the Strategy. Consultative arrangements have been established to involve all the involved international organizations, including donors. The World Bank and ECA will be working together in this framework and this will be reflected in the planned background document for the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission on the subject.

29. Concern had been expressed about the development of statistical services in Africa and provision of technical cooperation to them in a number of African international forums and in international organizations; this had led to the formulation and adoption of the Strategy. The Subcommittee welcomed the initiative and the constructive approach that had been developed with substantial dialogue among the involved organizations and countries. The Subcommittee looked forward to the approach resulting in concrete improvements.

G. Implications for technical cooperation in statistics of changes in United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) policies relating to project execution and agency support costs

H. The UNFPA Technical Support Services System (TSS)

30. The item was discussed on the basis of a report prepared by ESCAP (SA/1992/8).

31. The ESCAP report and statements from other regional commissions described the current disruptions observed, and problems anticipated based on current understandings on the delivery of regional advisory services on population matters, including demographic statistics, in the respective regions, resulting from the recent changes in the policies of UNFPA relating to agency support cost arrangements. The uncertainty of the impacts on technical cooperation in statistics of changes in UNDP arrangements was also mentioned. The representative of UNFPA described the purposes of the TSS system, its planned size, composition, deployment, tasks of the teams and the mechanisms by which they were expected to provide support to countries in a flexible way that was to be responsive to country needs. The representative of UNFPA noted the concern of the regional commissions and reaffirmed the commitment to delivering technical support of high quality, indicating that UNFPA would monitor the system to provide it in coordination and cooperation with the United Nations system, including the specialized agencies, the regional commissions and other United Nations organizations.

32. The Subcommittee considered that whatever faults may have existed in the delivery of technical cooperation to countries, the delivery in the field of statistics had been well done and effective, especially in population statistics. The Subcommittee expressed concern about the possible unanticipated negative implications of the changes in the field of support of this and related fields of statistics. The Subcommittee concluded that the situation and likely results were not clear at this stage and decided to consider the matter again at its twenty-seventh session when some experience on the effects of the new schemes would be available.

I. International Comparison Programme (ICP)

33. This item was considered on the basis of an oral report by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat.

34. The Subcommittee welcomed the completion of the draft ICP Handbook by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, with financial and technical inputs from the World Bank and valuable technical comments from other organizations and experts. The Subcommittee noted the work on the core commodity lists, selection of 1993 as reference year for regional comparisons and the status and prospects of ICP work in the various regions. Delays in publication of the phase V results were noted. It also welcomed the World

Bank's work on software development for ICP, expenditure data and research on and assistance to several of the countries of the former USSR. It noted the publication of ICP-related data and estimates by the World Bank. It further noted the publication of estimates of global economic series using various conversion factors by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat. Finally, the Subcommittee noted the efforts being made by the World Bank to encourage countries to integrate their ICP work into their regular work on price statistics.

35. Concern was expressed about the feasibility of achieving 1993 as a reference year given the financial situation and the status of methodological work on some technical questions. The Subcommittee urged that the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat convene a meeting, as soon as possible, to consider both the financial and the technical matters that were of concern. It was noted that the success of such a meeting would in large part depend on the participation of appropriate technical and policy staff of the involved organizations.

J. Procedures for adopting joint international statistical standards among two or more organizations

36. This item was discussed on the basis of an oral report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), concerning the logistics of adoption by both the ILO International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) and the United Nations Statistical Commission, which convened at different times, of standards in relation to employment in the informal sector and the International Classification of Status in Employment, both of which related to concerns of ILO and the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and to concerns of a broader group of organizations.

37. The Subcommittee recognized that there were cases where it was important for more than one intergovernmental body to consider and adopt a given standard, and these were two such cases. Participation by the secretariats in the development of draft standards was seen as promoting the acceptability of draft standards to the international intergovernmental bodies, and such joint work had been the case for these two standards. Specific actions were suggested for facilitating the adoption of these two standards by ICLS and the Statistical Commission. These included (a) sending drafts to the members of the Statistical Commission in advance for comment and to enable them to discuss the drafts with their national delegations to ICLS and (b) making members of the Statistical Commission's Working Group aware of the drafts during their meeting in June 1992. While these actions were specific to the subjects and organizations involved and did not involve a general policy discussion, it was considered that some of the issues were relevant and useful to other organizations.

K. International trade statistics

38. The item was discussed on the basis of an oral report by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat.

39. The Subcommittee welcomed the improved flow and quality of detailed trade data into the Commodity Trade Statistics Data Base (Comtrade), plans for including data according to the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) in the Comtrade database and work on adjustment of reported data and improving estimates in collaboration with other involved organizations. A meeting jointly sponsored by the World Bank, GATT and the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, with participation of other involved organizations, on adjustments and estimates was planned. It also noted work by IMF and the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat on reconciling aggregate trade data maintained by both organizations, and joint work by GATT and the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat on considering the future relationship of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC) and HS and the effects of amendments to the HS on continuity of statistical series by commodity. The Subcommittee further noted that, while there was considerable formal cooperation among several of the organizations on collection of trade data from countries and the sharing of data, there were emerging additional issues of coordination that should be addressed on (a) collection of data, and (b) the processing and dissemination of trade statistics according to the HS. The involved organizations were addressing these questions.

L. Environment statistics

40. The Subcommittee took note of an information note (unnumbered) from the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat. The Subcommittee recalled that, at its twenty-fifth session, it had expressed its regret that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) had not been represented at that session, and welcomed the participation of a representative of UNEP at the present session, and his indication of commitment to cooperation in the area, considering the importance of the overall issues of the environment and the continuing importance of coordination in relation to environment statistics.

M. Inventory of international statistical databases available in machine-readable form to outside users

41. The Subcommittee took note of an information note by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (SA/1992/11).

N. Updating the Women's Indicators and Statistics Database (WISTAT) and the second issue of the World's Women: Trends and Statistics

42. The Subcommittee took note of an information note by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (SA/1992/12).

O. UNDP Human Development Report

43. The item was discussed on the basis of an oral report by UNDP. The representative of UNDP thanked organizations for the collaboration they had provided for the three editions of the Human Development Report to date and outlined plans for future editions involving increased collaboration relating to the process of preparing the Report and its substance. The plans included (a) providing more attention to the statistical aspects of the Report, (b) circulating the outline of the Report in advance to all members of the Subcommittee for review and comment and (c) the convening of a technical meeting to discuss methodological and data aspects of the Report, including the Human Development Index and the Annex.

44. The Subcommittee welcomed the oral report, the intention of UNDP to improve ways of collaboration on the Report and the combined approach in the Report of covering both economic and human development issues. The Subcommittee restated the concerns it had expressed at previous sessions concerning (a) the need for collaboration in the early stages of preparing the Report, (b) reservations about aspects of methodology, including the methodology of composite indexes and (c) some issues relating to data aspects of the Report. The Subcommittee welcomed the plan for a technical meeting at which those issues could be addressed. The Subcommittee noted the desire of the producers of the Report to retain flexibility on the choice of content of the Report to enable it to address issues that would become high priority over time. However, it also restated its view that collaboration would be improved on data aspects if indicative information on plans for the Report several years ahead were available, so that organizations could review and consider the data needs and their possible contributions.

45. Based on past experience, the Subcommittee continued to have concerns about the statistical aspects of the Report, ways in which they might be addressed and the process for future collaboration. It decided to place the matter on the agenda of the twenty-seventh session and requested a report from UNDP on the coordination aspects, including methodological issues.

P. Monitoring achievement of social goals

46. The item was discussed on the basis of a report by WHO (SA/1992/10) on its work on health statistics and monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Health for All Strategy, especially reflecting the accelerated implementation of the Strategy to achieve the Health for All goal, and the importance of statistical cooperation related to the health field.

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47. The Subcommittee welcomed the collaboration between WHO and other organizations on aspects of the health statistics programme and monitoring and evaluation and noted the need for further intensive cooperation. It also welcomed the collaboration among several organizations on monitoring related to the goals set at the UNICEF Children's Summit and noted the technical problem of indicator selection where new problems emerge over time that require monitoring and where the problems and indicators differ from country to country.

48. The Subcommittee noted that pilot studies under the inter-agency initiative on monitoring achievement of social goals in the 1990s had been carried out and a synthesis report prepared and circulated to selected organizations. The Subcommittee agreed to include a further consideration of the monitoring initiative at its twenty-seventh session, and noted that in the meantime the involved organizations would communicate with other interested organizations concerning the experiences of the pilot studies, future plans and coordination with other related programmes, including the National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP), the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) and the Social Dimensions of Adjustments Programme (SDA).

Q. Base year for international statistics

49. The item was discussed on the basis of a report by GATT (SA/1992/9) on the rationale, methodology and likely effects of rebasing external trade indices.

50. The Subcommittee noted the technical issues involved and the varied current practices and plans of organizations on the selection of a base year for statistical series. The Subcommittee recognized the benefits of more frequent rebasing to reflect important structural changes and expressed interest in the use of annual chained indices and the use of an "average of years" should fixed weights be used. The Subcommittee, while recognizing benefits for users from a uniform base year for international series published by various organizations, concluded that organizations needed to make decisions on rebasing index numbers on a pragmatic basis reflecting the best technical practice for each field of statistics and other relevant factors that each organization may have to consider.

R. Preparations for the twenty-seventh session (1993)
of the Statistical Commission

51. The Subcommittee noted that: (a) the agenda and documentation for the session had been finalized by the Statistical Commission's Working Group in September 1991, (b) the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and other involved organizations were proceeding with the preparation of the documentation, (c) the required collaboration or joint work was being undertaken and (d) inputs had been requested from organizations, as necessary.

S. Time and place and draft provisional agenda of the twenty-seventh session of the Subcommittee

52. The Subcommittee recommended that its twenty-seventh session be held the week before the Conference of European Statisticians (currently scheduled for 14-18 June 1993), that is, 7 to 11 June 1993, at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome. The Subcommittee noted the usefulness in the present session of making available "background documents" or "notes for information", which provided useful information to members of the Subcommittee on a number of topics but which did not require formal introduction or discussion in the meeting. The Subcommittee considered that this practice could be used more extensively at the twenty-seventh session. The Subcommittee considered that the following items should be included in the draft provisional agenda for its twenty-seventh session:

1. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.

(Documentation: provisional agenda, list of documentation and tentative schedule of discussion)

2. Strengthening international statistical cooperation:

(a) Follow-up to the review of the Global Statistical System;

(Documentation: report prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat on the implementation of recommendations)

(b) Long-term plan of methodological development in the international statistical organizations;

(Documentation: report from the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, containing proposals on assessing what is needed, its content, how to develop the plan and prospects for its utilization)

(c) The evolving role of the statistical service in an international organization.

(Documentation: oral reports)

3. Statistical implications of developments in transition countries.

(Documentation: report from EUROSTAT on the work it is coordinating on the Central and Eastern European countries, including the work of other organizations in the Intersecretariat Group; report from IMF in relation to its initiatives and coordination activity in relation to the countries of the former USSR; report from ESCAP and the World Bank on cooperation with transition countries in regions outside Europe; and report from UNICEF and WHO on the needs and activities

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and related coordination issues with respect to the social sectors)

4. Collection, publication and dissemination policy, including coordination of statistical databases.

(Documentation: reports of the Technical Working Group on Statistical Databases on its 1992 and 1993 sessions; reports by organizations for plans for changed or new data collection)

5. Revision and implementation of the System of National Accounts (SNA).

(Documentation: report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts)

6. Coordination of technical cooperation in statistics:

- (a) Implications for technical cooperation in statistics of changes in United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) policies relating to project execution and agency support costs;

(Documentation: reports from organizations)

- (b) Coordination of technical cooperation for statistical development in Africa;

(Documentation: report from ECA and interested organizations)

- (c) Other matters.

(Documentation: discussion on important issues, as necessary)

7. Human development issues:

- (a) UNDP Human Development Report;

(Documentation: report prepared by UNDP)

- (b) Other matters, including monitoring achievement of social goals.

(Documentation: report on monitoring achievement of social goals in the 1990s)

8. Coordination of ongoing statistical programmes:

- (a) Coordination issues relating to environment statistics in the light of recommendations from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development;

(b) Coordination issues relating to tourism activities in the light of new concepts and definitions.

(Documentation: reports on the specified items and discussion on important additional issues, as necessary)

9. Follow-up to the twenty-seventh session (1993) of the Statistical Commission.

(Documentation: oral report)

10. Other business.

11. Time and place of the twenty-eighth session.

12. Adoption of the report of the Subcommittee on its twenty-seventh session and draft provisional agenda for the twenty-eighth session.

Annex I

DETAILED COMMENTS ON CHAPTERS OF THE WORKING DRAFT REPORT
PREPARED BY THE STATISTICAL OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
SECRETARIAT ON THE REVIEW OF THE GLOBAL STATISTICAL
SYSTEM a/ (SA/1992/2 and Add.1 and 2) b/

Chapter 1A. Current and foreseen challenges - statistical
methods and standards

1. Evaluate how relevant to users' needs are the topics selected by organizations on which to develop standards.
2. Determine the time-frame from perceiving the need to develop standards in a certain area to completing their development and consider what can be done to improve the situation.
3. For each chapter subheading include an evaluation of the work of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat in that area.
4. Provide a fuller explanation of the needs for training at the national level.
5. Address the various purposes of standards - global, regional and country-specific - and consider how to reconcile the sometimes conflicting needs.
6. Recognize specifically two models that have been used for the development of standards: (a) setting standards at the global level and having regional groups adapt them to their own needs, and (b) developing standards at the regional level and adapting them for global use. Recognize the regional initiatives in Europe on methodology and explore the ways for these to also be in harmony with global needs. The need to involve developing countries at an early stage in the process should be articulated more fully.
7. Recognize that resource constraints have affected the capacity of individual organizations to carry out work on standards in response to changing needs on a timely basis. Evaluate the experience of the joint work on the SNA and in other areas, with a view to seeing if the approach should be repeated for other areas. Propose alternative approaches if that model is judged to be not fully effective based on experience.
8. In relation to the proposed integrated 10-year plan, propose priority areas for new standards and methodological work, provide for identifying concrete steps and resources, and seek the views of the Statistical Commission. This 10-year plan would be a useful tool for improving individual organization work programmes and coordination among organizations and for improving ability to maintain schedules of work.

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The report should be more specific on assessing what is needed, its content, how to develop the plans and prospects for its utilization.

9. Both standards and methods need to be addressed, including manuals, standard questionnaires and software packages and how to develop them. Country needs for these have not been met.
10. Consider whether alternative organizational arrangements and sources of resources such as technicians supplied by individual countries would be more effective. There should be a flexible approach, making the best use of available resources and interests and not holding back any developmental work in countries or international organizations that are able to proceed with work.
11. The presentation should be made more analytical rather than descriptive.
12. Address the methodology involved in developing standards. Evaluate whether the aim is to develop what is practical or what is ideal; establish what is meant by a standard and address whether they should be developed on a consensus basis.
13. Take account of the capacity of countries, particularly developing countries, to adopt new standards. They need training and financial resources.
14. The existence of separate advisory/intergovernmental bodies for many of the organizations and the role they play in determining work programmes needs to be recognized.
15. Recognize the need to pay attention to human development and social impacts.
16. Take care to cross-reference, as necessary, between the various sub-chapters as they are all interrelated.
17. Clarify terminology used - methodology, standards, guidelines.

Current and foreseen challenges - data compilation, dissemination and technology

1. Three kinds of data need to be identified, (a) national data collected, (b) internationally comparable data and (c) associated meta-data, each providing its own challenges. One task is to help countries establish the capability to supply the data they need and on a timely basis. This can help reduce the availability of multiple series being released by various national organizations. Efforts to impress upon countries the need to disseminate available data quickly should be described.

2. The demand for data is growing rapidly and changing and the report should address how to meet it. The demand is for more sophisticated data (detail, consistency, speed of availability) and the challenges relate to how to collect, store and disseminate it. The report should also address the demand for more varied access to data and the right choices in meeting the demands.
3. Reconsider the value, in terms of relevance and timeliness, of continuing to publish the large Yearbooks and other publications and reflect on the resource implications and savings if such a reconsideration were pursued, and the value and use of the publications in some regions. This would need to take account of the fact that in countries at different degrees of development, availability of PCs may differ and hence the abilities to use machine-readable data, so that printed publications remained essential in such circumstances.
4. Consider that circumstances have changed, the old mandates need review and users want more user-friendly data such as ratios, growth rates. Should also consider redefining what is collected from countries in terms of detail and assessing possible elimination of collection of data that are no longer in demand.
5. Address the need to review the markets for statistical products and assess the growing needs for machine-readable data in some areas. Work on reviewing publications in the ECE region was relevant.
6. Recognize that quality and reliability are not uniform across all fields of international statistics.
7. In relation to secondary dissemination, consider establishment of a "code of conduct" on how organizations should quote data from other organizations and the extent to which technical notes and footnotes should be reflected.
8. Where strengths and weaknesses have been defined, explain how the strengths have been achieved. Consider remedies for the weaknesses.

Technical cooperation

1. Include a brief statement of challenges, successes and failures, and changes that are necessary, and new challenges such as provision of technical cooperation to the countries in transition.
2. Address resource constraints, the importance of handbooks and training in promoting methodology and capacity-building for countries' own purposes, advantages of providing technical cooperation in an integrated approach, building up capacities and management capabilities and in a package approach, including model questionnaires and software.

3. Elaborate on training trainers and managers and the ability to support country efforts on a short notice basis for specific problems.
4. Recognize that there has been competition and competing programmes and establish how to overcome this situation.
5. Clarify the intended role of the inter-agency task force or committee on statistics for coordination and monitoring the implementation of technical cooperation (para. 7).
6. Clarify new approaches for attracting donor support (para. 5).
7. Clarify the requirement that "future technical cooperation activities should be well coordinated ..." (para. 7).
8. Recognize that countries have a need for technical cooperation in compilation but a limited capacity to absorb it. Also recognize that losses of trained statistical staff are large so there is a need for continuous attention to training. It should also address a strategy for training which might involve as a first step strengthening the training services of the national statistical offices; the training of users of statistics is difficult to address but requires thought.
9. Recognize that a "needs assessment" is a useful tool for establishing technical cooperation needs. Care should be taken in determining the desired mix of training and other components in a project, but the determination and measurement are difficult. The most effective mix between long-term advisers or resident experts and short-term advisory missions needs to be assessed and, in an increasing number of situations, the short-term advisory services are considered more cost-effective.
10. Address the need for bilateral donors to be involved in coordination.
11. Explore the role in future of technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC).

Coordination

1. Reduce the descriptive elements, particularly in paras. 5-13.
2. Be more specific on the proposals to the Statistical Commission (para. 23).
3. Be more specific on how proposals may evolve on decentralization (para. 24) by specifying subjects, organizations and whether the proposals might involve more centralization or decentralization. Recognize that with burden-sharing, for example in collection, compilation and processing, collaborating organizations may have different priorities about series, the content and nature of publications and timing, which would need to be accommodated.

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4. Emphasize that coordination at the planning stage is an essential first step to be followed by coordination during implementation, but the latter is more difficult to achieve. The time-scale for achieving cooperative arrangements after work programmes have been established is extremely long (para. 2).
5. Clarify that coordination is intended to be broad in terms of organizations involved. In certain fields, it is important to include non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as some are involved in collecting data that are used by international organizations.
6. Recognize that coordination is difficult to achieve because the different organizations have different mandates, clientele, governing bodies, methods etc.
7. Clarify what is proposed for the role of the Statistical Commission in relation to coordination of the work of specialized agencies (para. 3, item 2).
8. Clarify the regional statistical bodies referred to (para. 3, item 5).
9. Clarify what is meant by coordination of inputs into major analytical reports of the United Nations organizations. Does it involve a common database, uniform definitions? (para. 3, item 6).
10. Discussion at the session of the Statistical Commission's Working Group had invited open thinking on the question of the role of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat in the context of the review (para. 3, item 15).
11. Clarify the reference to "how to deal with disparities in resources among organizations" (para. 3, item 24).
12. Emphasize that the coordination problem does need basic rethinking, but including learning from past experiences (para. 23).
13. Clarify whether referring to resources of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat or globally and specify actions to be proposed (para. 24, item 1).
14. In relation to the review of work programmes, specify who should carry out the reviews, when and how they should be carried out (para. 24, item 2).
15. Clarify that it is not considered in the purview of the report to make recommendations concerning the intergovernmental bodies (para. 24, item 4).

16. The report should consider and clarify why coordination is carried out and what it is that should be coordinated; assess the past efforts and achievements, difficulties, strengths and weaknesses, identify the challenges and expectations and how to deal with them and identify lessons from the past that can be applied in the future.
17. Propose efforts to promote coordinating national views expressed in different intergovernmental bodies.
18. Emphasize maintenance of contact among agencies to know what each agency is doing and especially to take account of ongoing work of other organizations when an organization is considering an initiative.
19. In many of the elements in para. 3 the aim is to expand on each issue to explain why it is an issue and why it is still outstanding (para. 3, items 1-24).

Practices and policy on adjustments and estimates in the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat

Incorporate practices and policies in other organizations on adjustments and estimates, particularly if it remained a chapter of the report on the Global Statistical System, rather than being reported on separately.

Notes

- a/ For general comments, see paras. 6-16 above.
- b/ Paragraph references are to SA/1992/2 and Add.1 and 2.

Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

<u>Document number</u>	<u>Agenda item</u>	<u>Title or description</u>
SA/1992/1/Rev.1	1	Provisional agenda
SA/1992/1/Add.1	1	Proposed schedule of discussions
SA/1992/2 and Add.1 and 2	2(a)	Working draft report on the Global Statistical System (Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat)
Unnumbered	2(a)	Description of the Global Statistical System: Supplement B (Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat)
Unnumbered	2(a)	Extract from the report of the Statistical Commission's Working Group
SA/1992/3	2(b)	The state of international merchandise trade statistics on a customs basis (GATT, Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat)
SA/1992/4	2(b)	Improving the quality and comparability of merchandise trade data and estimates among international organizations - Part III (GATT)
SA/1992/5	2(b)	Statistical implications of the single market of the EEC (EUROSTAT)
SA/1992/6	3	Statistical implications of developments in transition countries (EUROSTAT)
SA/1992/7	5(a)	Coordination issues involved in strategies for statistical development in Africa (ECA)
SA/1992/8	5(b)	Delivery of regional advisory services on population matters in the ESCAP region (ESCAP)
Unnumbered	7	Note on environment statistics (Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat)

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<u>Document number</u>	<u>Agenda item</u>	<u>Title or description</u>
SA/1992/9	8	Rationale, methodology and likely effects of the rebasing of external trade indexes (GATT)
SA/1992/10	6(b)	Review of statistical activities related to health (WHO)
SA/1992/11	7	Inventory of international statistical databases available in machine-readable form (Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat)
SA/1992/12	6(b)	Updating the Women's Indicators and Statistics Database and the second issue of the <u>World's Women: Trends and Statistics</u> (Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat)

Annex III

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

United Nations entities and programmes

Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat	W. Seltzer (Chairman) R. Roberts (Secretary)
Economic Commission for Africa	A. E. Cummings-Palmer
Economic Commission for Europe	J. Kelly
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	A. J. Flatt
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	L. Abdunnur
United Nations Children's Fund	G. Jones
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	A. Taj
United Nations Development Programme	I. Kaul
United Nations Environment Programme	H. Abaza
United Nations Population Fund	S. Bernstein
United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)	L. Ludvigsen
United Nations International Drug Control Programme	O. Norsker
United Nations Research Institute for Social Development	D. Westendorff

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Specialized agencies and GATT

International Labour Organisation	F. Mehran
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	J. Ay

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United Nations Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

F. El-Boustani

World Health Organization

H. Hapsara
H. Dixon

World Bank

R. Chander

International Monetary Fund

M. Caiola

International Telecommunication Union

I. Syed
M. Minges

United Nations Industrial Development
Organization

R. Ballance

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

J. M. Leger

* * *

Other organizations

European Economic Community

J. Whitworth

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and
Development

P. Hill

World Tourism Organization

E. Paci

Advisory Committee for the Coordination of
Information Systems

C. Szpak
