

ACC SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES
Twenty-eighth session
Rome, 8-10 June 1994
Item 2 of the provisional agenda

SA/1994/2
5 May 1994

MATTERS CONSIDERED BY THE BUREAU
AT ITS MEETING ON 14 APRIL 1994

Report of the Bureau

1. The Bureau met on Thursday 14 April 1994. The meeting was attended by J. McLenaghan (IMF), A. Elson (IMF), P. Sainz (ECLAC), F. Mehran (ILO), W. Seltzer (UNSTAT), R. Roberts (UNSTAT). H. Habermann, Director-designate of UNSTAT, was present as an observer. The annotated agenda of the Bureau meeting, which provides background information for each item, is attached as Annex I. The Bureau's consideration of each item of the agenda follows:

(a) Changing the base year for statistics

2. The task forces had been asked earlier to look into the issue. However, only limited information had become available from them. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to remind task force conveners to consult with their members and to report to the Subcommittee in June 1994. As the task forces do not cover all the subject areas where the question of base year is relevant, agencies with responsibilities in those areas e.g. labour statistics, were also requested to be in a position to express their views at the Subcommittee session.

(b) Terms of reference of the Task Force on the Measurement of Poverty

3. The Chairman of the Subcommittee will contact the World Bank and request that the new draft of the terms of reference agreed at the Statistical Commission be circulated to concerned agencies for comment, and a revised draft subsequently be circulated to Bureau members so that a terms of reference agreed to by the Bureau could be submitted to the Subcommittee at the June 1994 session.

(c) Task Force on Service Statistics

4. At its special session, the Statistical Commission agreed that a task force be set up, convened by OECD, focusing on international trade in services. The Chairman of the Subcommittee will contact Mr. C. L. Kincannon and ask him to consult with the organizations likely to be members of the task force, to prepare a terms of reference for consideration by the Subcommittee at its session in June 1994.

(d) Needs for statistics of the analytical and policy units of international organizations and the statistics produced by those organizations

5. The Bureau agreed that research should be carried out in several international organizations, including OECD, on the two elements in paragraph 2 of Mr. Fellegi's letter of 18 March 1994 (See Annex III attached for exchange of correspondence between Mr. J. McLenaghan and Mr. I. Fellegi). The Chairman of the Subcommittee agreed to contact Mr. Fellegi to determine his view on which element of paragraph 2 of his letter has the higher priority. ^{mechanisms in place} UNSTAT agreed to prepare a note on the work done in the international organizations over recent years on coordinating ad hoc requests to countries from non-statistical units in the international organizations, and request members of the Subcommittee to provide updated information on the experience of their organizations, including the implementation of the monitoring systems that had been introduced by most organizations. The selection of organizations to carry out the research should be done at the Subcommittee meeting in June 1994, with reports, including the above-mentioned report by UNSTAT, to be available for the 1995 Subcommittee meeting, allowing a report to the Statistical Commission's Working Group in September 1995.

(e) Plan the next session of the Subcommittee including establishing the agenda and ensuring its forward looking orientation

6. The Bureau finalized the agenda and documentation for the Subcommittee's session in June 1994, which will be issued shortly.

(f) Coordination of bilateral technical cooperation in statistics

7. Lack of information on bilateral technical assistance that was being provided or planned, made it difficult to deal with the issue of coordination of technical cooperation. It was recognized that such information was very difficult to compile and subject to issues of interpretation as the assistance flows through various channels and this leads to problems of multiple reporting. The Bureau decided to request the task forces to address the question in their work programmes, at a later date, with a low priority.

(g) Membership of the Bureau and Chairmanship of the ACC Subcommittee

8. The Bureau agreed that, based on the experience to date, the experiment of establishing a Bureau had been successful. The Bureau agreed that the Subcommittee had established the membership of the Bureau on an institutional and not a personal

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after each two year period

basis (See Annex II attached). However, as with the Subcommittee itself, the heads of statistics of the organizations should be expected to attend the Bureau meetings. The Bureau recommended to the Subcommittee that (i) inclusion of four organizations as established by the Subcommittee was appropriate; (ii) ~~the Bureau considered that, in principle, the terms of members should be two years, except that UNSTAT, as the Secretariat, would continuously be a member, ^{two}to provide continuity, the change in membership should be staggered, with one member changing each year; this would mean that some current members would serve for terms longer than two years;~~ (iii) the Chairman of the Subcommittee should serve for a two year period and be eligible for re-election; (iv) the question of the Chairmanship and the election of new members of the Bureau would have to be addressed in 1995, and (v) at that same time, the experience with separating Chairmanship and Secretariat should be assessed.

(h) Follow-up of the discussions of the Subcommittee during the inter-sessional period

9. The Bureau welcomed the activities of the Chairman and Secretariat which had been effective in promoting and progressing the work of the Subcommittee on an on-going basis in the inter-session period, in line with the Subcommittee's wishes.

(i) General questions on the relationship of the ACC Subcommittee and the Statistical Commission's Working Group, with the task forces

10. This question was added to the agenda of the Bureau, arising out of discussions at the special session of the Statistical Commission. The Bureau agreed that the Subcommittee should continue to review the work of each of the task forces as major elements of the effort to improve coordination, and to report its views to the Working Group. The Subcommittee should ^{also} be involved in establishing the terms of reference and work plans of the task forces. At the Subcommittee session in June 1994 the task force conveners should present reports, oral or written, dealing with coordination issues; detailed reports of substantive work done are not called for, but the coordination work itself may constitute a major part of the work done.

11. The Bureau decided that the Subcommittee should (a) assess the total work load that had developed in relation to coordination, including the recent establishment of two new task forces and additional activities requested by the special session of the Statistical Commission, (b) address the matter in its report, and (c) bring it to the attention of the twenty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission.

ACC SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES

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BUREAU OF THE ACC SUBCOMMITTEE ON
STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES
New York, 14 April 1994
Item 1 of the provisional agenda

29 March 1994

Provisional agenda

1. Changing the base year for statistics

Notes

The Subcommittee requested each task force to review the question of changing the base year for statistical series in its area of concern and to report the results to UNSTAT for circulation to members of the Subcommittee. The Subcommittee requested the Bureau to review the results and decide whether the matter should be taken up by the Subcommittee at its twenty-eighth session (ACC/1993/1, para.19).

Task forces were reminded in a letter dated 7 March 1994 from the Secretariat.

2. Terms of reference of the Task Force on the Measurement of Poverty

Notes

The Subcommittee noted that many organizations were concerned with the question of poverty and were taking initiatives on data, measurement and other aspects of the question; agreed to establish a Task Force on the Measurement of Poverty and requested the World Bank to act as convener and to associate the regional commissions with it. Draft terms of reference were adopted subject to further review by the World Bank and the Bureau (ACC/1993/1, para.27(b)).

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The World Bank has further reviewed the draft terms of reference and circulated them for comment. Comments were provided by UNSTAT, ECLAC, ILO and IMF. The World Bank has prepared a revised draft and circulated it for additional comments.

3. Task Force on Service Statistics

Note

The Chairman of the Subcommittee has reported to the Special Session of the Statistical Commission as follows: "I have carried out consultations with several agencies on the matter of finding a convener. However, no convener has yet been identified, so that at present the establishment of the task force is expected to await the conclusion of the work of one of the existing task forces." (E/CN.3/1994/11, para. 2).

4. Needs for statistics of the analytical and policy units of international organizations and the statistics produced by those organizations.

The view was expressed by Statistics Canada at the 1993 session of the Statistical Commission's Working Group that the statistics needed by the analytical and policy-oriented units of secretariats of international organizations, and the statistics produced by those organizations themselves, were often not sufficiently in harmony. This involved the basic relationship between users and producers of international statistics. The question was raised whether the Statistical Commission would wish to consider the matter. The Working Group noted the widely varying needs and orientations of international organizations and their efforts to achieve economy and efficiency in data collection. The Working Group requested Statistics Canada to work with the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities to further develop the issue for initial discussion at the 1994 session of the Working Group and possible discussion at a future session of the Commission (E/CN.3/1994/2, para.44).

The Chairman of the Subcommittee wrote to Statistics Canada on 5 January 1994 asking for their views on the key issues they believe should be addressed. Statistics Canada's reply of 18 March was circulated to members of the Bureau by the Chairman on 24 March.

5. Plan the next session of the Subcommittee including establishing the agenda and ensuring its forward looking orientation.

Notes

List of potential items for consideration by the Subcommittee is attached.

6. Coordination of bilateral technical cooperation in statistics

Notes

The Statistical Commission's Working Group requested the task forces to consider technical cooperation in each of their areas (E/CN.3/1994/2, para.16). The Bureau may consider ways to treat the specific issue of bilateral technical cooperation, including the role of the task forces.

7. Membership of the Bureau and Chairmanship of the ACC Subcommittee

Notes

Some organizations have questioned whether membership of the Bureau is institutional or individual. The Bureau may wish to clarify this for the next session of the Subcommittee (See ACC/1993/1, para.13 attached for composition and terms of reference). At its twenty-seventh session the Subcommittee decided that a decision on long-term arrangements for the Chairmanship should be deferred until the twenty-eighth session (ACC/1993/1, para. 13).

8. Follow-up of the discussions of the Subcommittee during the inter-sessional period:

Notes

Relevant activities of the Chairman and the Secretariat have included:

1 November 1993 Secretariat letter circulating draft report of the twenty-seventh session to members for comment.

November/December 1993 Letter-head for use in relation to the affairs of the Subcommittee was prepared by the Chairman and Secretariat.

8 December 1993 Chairman's letter circulating the revised report of the twenty-seventh session to members.

10 December 1993 Chairman's letter circulating summaries of the activities of each of the task forces.

12 January 1994: Chairman's letter to members of the Bureau on the general role and some specific tasks of the Bureau.

10-27 January 1994: Lists of follow-ups and designated actors were prepared by the Chairman and the Secretariat.

9 February: Secretariat's letter circulating 6 reports of the task forces (for the special session of the Statistical Commission).

7 March 1994: Secretariat's letter on responsibilities of the Task Forces.

9 and 29 March: Secretariat circulated (the remaining) two reports of the task forces (for the special session of the Commission).

11 March 1994: Chairman's letter to members circulating the final report of the twenty-seventh session and a report on follow-up actions taken.

17 March 1994: Secretariat's letter circulating "Annotated list of coordination tools", background information on the ACC Subcommittee and a summary of the report of the Subcommittee on its twenty-seventh session, to all national statistical offices.

Annex II

Membership and responsibilities of the Bureau

The Subcommittee established, on an experimental basis, a Bureau, initially comprised of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and UNSTAT, with the following terms of reference: "To provide guidance to the overall work of the Subcommittee, including (a) to follow up the decisions of the current session during the inter-sessional period and (b) to plan the next session, including establishing the agenda and ensuring its forward-looking orientation." With the exception of UNSTAT, the members of the Bureau would be subject to change over time (ACC/1993/1, para.13).

Annex III

ACC SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES

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January 5, 1994

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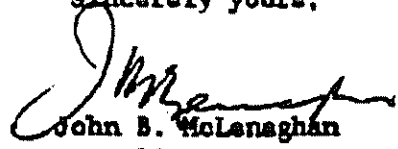
Dear Mr. Fellegi:

At its sixteenth session in September 1993, the UN Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination, at the suggestion of Mr. Prigly, considered the needs for statistics of the analytical and policy units of international organizations and the statistics produced by those organizations. The view was expressed that these needs are often not in sufficient harmony. This subject was thought to be a matter for consideration by the Statistical Commission.

In concluding its discussion the Working Group asked Statistics Canada to work with the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities to further develop the formulation of this issue for discussion at its 1994 session (which will be in September) and possible discussion at a future session of the Commission.

This is a subject that has been given attention at international statistical meetings on previous occasions and is one in which I am aware you have expressed particular interest. In order that we can respond to the request of the Working Group, I would be grateful for your views on the key issues that you believe should be addressed. I then propose to ask the members of the Bureau of the ACC Subcommittee to determine how we should proceed.

Sincerely yours,



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Director
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Mr. John B. McLenaghan
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Dear John:

This is further to your letter of January 5 concerning the issue of appropriate links between statistical and policy units in international organizations. Indeed we are very keen on promoting a wide ranging discussion of the relations between international statistical agencies and their clients. Accordingly, we are prepared to do what we can to support the inclusion of an item dealing with this topic in the agenda of a future meeting of the Statistical Commission or for that matter, of a meeting of the Conference of European Statisticians.

I am not aware of any discussion of this topic, at least not within recent memory. And yet there are at least two troubling consequences of a failure to review outputs in the light of current client requirements. Firstly, it is almost a routine at meetings of the Commission that we collectively deplore the fact that policy oriented offices within international organizations engage in their own collection of statistics. Examples of such collections abound and more often than not, the counterpart statistical office appears to be powerless to put a stop to them or even to find out that they are taking place. Secondly, there is evidence that many of the standard data collections designed to support omnibus statistical annuals are no longer required by those very same policy offices which got them started in the first place.

If these impressions are correct, the immediate causes must be easy to identify, based on

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comparable national experiences. They probably include an absence of substantive interaction between statisticians and their policy level colleagues within international agencies. Should this be the case, then the latter might cease to identify the statistical office as a valuable resource, a means to ensure the systematic compilation of information, and to make such information comparable among countries. Surely it is our task as members of the governing bodies of international statistical offices to bring users and compilers together and help frame a coherent policy covering both the supply and demand for international statistics.

I realize that I keep on referring to "international statistical offices" as if they all fitted the same description. This is patently not the case. But there are a few (more than a few?) which do not entertain close contacts with their internal clients and the results show in the relevance of their programmes. It is for their sake that I would like to see these concerns elevated to an item for discussion by the Statistical Commission.

I do not think that I should suggest at this stage how we should go about preparing such a discussion. For it to be useful we shall need full cooperation from users in a few key organizations. We can capitalise on a number of advantages that we did not have previously. For example, the fact that the Under-Secretary General responsible for economic affairs at the UN is the ex-head of INSEE makes an enormous difference. The fact that we now have a Chief Statistician as a Branch Director at the OECD also makes a big difference. Once we agree that the topic is worthwhile and should be given a place on the agenda, we can start worrying about the preparatory work that is required to make this a successful and productive initiative.

Do let me know whether this constitutes a solid enough basis to get started.

Yours sincerely,

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IVAN P. FELLEGI

Ivan P. Fellegi

