

ACC SUB-COMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES
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COORDINATION ISSUES AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

THE ACC'S FUNCTIONS IN STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

Report prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America
and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

A. THE NATURE OF THE FUNCTIONS

1. The Statistical Commission has proposed, and in some cases carried out, some institutional reforms in the international statistical system. Among them, the strengthening of the roles of the Regional Commissions and the regional conferences have been emphasized. Nevertheless, in this area there is still a wide gap between the objectives and the means to achieve it. In other fields, tasks force have been established or priorities adopted. Therefore, regarding the above mentioned roles, it will be necessary to create institutional mechanisms in order to fulfil the proposed objective.

2. Strengthening the role of the Regional Commissions in the field of statistics implies at least two major changes in their present structure. On the one hand, it will be necessary to allocate more resources to promote the priority tasks that benefit the greatest number of member countries in their respective areas of action and, on the other hand, it will be very important to maintain close coordination on the intra and interregional level with the organizations that provide technical and financial cooperation, most of which, at the same time, are members of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities of the Statistical Commission.

3. The ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities is one of the most powerful mechanism of coordination of the international statistical system. Nonetheless, up to now its efforts have been mainly concentrated on global coordination, meaning by that coordination at inter-regional level. Most probably, it is not its role to discuss the content of intraregional coordination, but it could help to define its nature and scope by differentiating actions in both areas and sponsoring the development of coordination at the regional level among its member institutions.

B. FIELDS OF COORDINATION

4. The present agenda related with actions of coordination includes issues such as national accounts, trade, industrial, environment, services, and price statistics. Up to now coordination is being developed at the interregional level. It is clear that in these fields, after developing coordination at the inter-regional level, many activities devoted to improve the quality and opportunity of national statistics will be necessary, and therefore its coordination.

5. Which is the appropriate fora to discuss that coordination? The respective task force could take care of a first stage of such a coordination, but at the same time a regional fora should be considered to continue the work at the intraregional level. On the other hand, regional commissions are not always able to attend the meetings of the task forces. Due to the fact that ACC has in its agenda the overview of the task forces and that the regional commissions are members, it is an appropriate fora to discuss the relations between these two types of work. A good example is the case of foreign trade statistics. Through the work of a task force in this field, many shortcomings of national statistics have been detected and a coordinated strategy, to overcome those shortcomings at the global level, is being realized throughout the assignation of specific tasks to different institutions.

6. Likely, a second stage should pursue an improvement of methods, classifications and measurements at the national level; however, it is not clear that all these efforts must be intraregional; it could rather be decided that some institutions as IMF and UNSTAT assume roles at the central levels devoted to all countries. But even in this case, a certain joint effort with regional commissions or institutions could be envisaged; in this context, to define the division of labour in each field seems useful and necessary. Simultaneously, an important effort at intra-regional level could be developed. The ACC Subcommittee should be informed of what is happening at the global and intraregional level and some coordinating role could be very useful.

7. It should also be remembered that some of the institutions participating in the ACC Subcommittee play a major role in financing statistical activities in the countries. Many times, the lack of participation of the regional commissions in the coordination of these activities at the intraregional level implies an inefficient use of resources. Consequently, it would be extremely useful if this type of regional cooperation could be discussed at a regional fora, like the meeting of directors of statistical institutions of countries.

C. WHERE TO START WORK

8. At the beginning, it seems inconvenient to undertake coordinating roles of this type at all fields at one time; perhaps it could be useful to select, for example, one or two. The System of National Accounts 1993 (SNA 1993) is one where some actions in this type of coordinations could be established. In this context, on the one hand the Intersecretarial Working Group could list the kind of actions to be coordinated at global level such as the adoption and improvement

of the methodological work, including the content of SNA 1993. Training is probably a class of activity where the institutional responsibilities should be assigned. In the implementation of the SNA 1993 different types of activities could be defined. On the other hand, regional commissions could list the type of actions that the regional fora should discuss with the participation of the agencies involved in each topic. During the next ACC meeting a small executive paper could be prepared proposing the actions at different levels and its coordination. A similar action could be established in the field of trade statistics.

D. POSSIBLE DECISIONS OF ACC SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES

- a) Does a clear area of coordination exists in relation to the strengthening of the role of the regional commissions?
- b) If so, could some concrete tasks be selected in some fields and assigned to one or more members or working groups.