

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 COMMISSIONSContribution of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)A. Strengthening of regional commissions

1. One of the functions of international statistical organizations is that of ensuring comparability of data across countries and over time. This means the development of statistical standards and promotion or provision of assistance in their applications. Strengthening the role of regional commissions in the field of statistics implies strengthening activities related to the function stated above at the intraregional level. In strengthening the above activities regional commissions have the task of coordinating at their level while the ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities has the function of coordinating at the interregional level.

2. It should be observed that while current efforts to make the United Nations system more efficient include decentralization of some activities to the regional commissions, much more support would be needed than just decentralisation of specific activities and corresponding posts. Adequate and sufficient resources are needed to enable existing institutional mechanisms to function efficiently. To this end, a review of the resource allocation for statistical activities within the United Nations System should be undertaken.

B. Fields and Means of Coordination

3. The present agenda on coordination of statistical activities by the ACC Sub-Committee includes issues on national accounts, trade, industrial, environment, services and price statistics. There is need to include topics in the area of statistical development which are being emphasized in developing countries.

4. Among a wide range of statistical areas, Statistical Development includes statistical training, data processing, research, methods and standards and organization and management of national statistical systems. These areas were considered to be of primary concern in the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in the 1990's which was formulated by African Statisticians and endorsed by the ECA Conference of Ministers responsible for Economic Planning and Development in 1990. The Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development (CASD) which was formed in 1992 as part of the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action adopted the above statistical areas for examination by its Sub-Committees.

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5. CASD, whose secretariat is in the ECA, helps to coordinate national, regional and global actions undertaken within the framework of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action. Nearly all relevant United Nations Organizations and agencies as well as statistical offices and training institutions in Africa, Europe and the United States of America participate in the annual meetings of CASD. There is need to find ways and means of strengthening activities of CASD and its Sub-Committees and as such ACC Sub-Committee could emphasize the need for members to main-stream their activities as members of CASD and its Sub-Committees in their agency/institution work programmes so that activities could be performed on a continuous rather than an ad-hoc basis.

6. Concerning institutional mechanisms for coordination of regional conferences in the African region, these mechanisms are already in place. The Conference of African Planners, Statisticians Population and Information Specialists (formerly the Joint Conference of African Planners Statisticians and Demographers), meets biennially to discuss issues of relevance. However the attendance of member States in this Conference needs to be strengthened.

C. Implementation of Coordination Mechanism

7. In order to implement coordination mechanism, appropriate fora have to be established for discussing coordination issues. At the interregional level, Task Forces have already been established in the following subject areas: national accounts, industrial and construction statistics, international trade statistics, services statistics, finance statistics, price statistics, and environment statistics.

8. The Task Force on International Trade Statistics requested the Economic Commission for Africa to undertake a study on problems faced by African countries in international trade statistical operations. The results of this study will enable the Task Force to suggest ways of solving problems which may be identified. This will no doubt assist in strengthening the role of ECA in this field. In this connection there may be need for regional commissions to coordinate specific actions, at the intraregional level, to study areas of major concern to them and report to the ACC Sub-Committee at the interregional level.

9. Another area which will require interregional as well as intraregional coordination concerns the implementation of global statistical programmes such as the 1993 United Nations System of National Accounts. While regional commissions are discussing and developing implementation plans, the Task Force on National Accounts could provide advice and assistance to the regional commissions in consultation/collaboration with UNSTAT.