

IMPROVEMENT OF COORDINATION TOOLS

"An Integrated Approach to the Presentation of
Statistical Programmes in Global Setting"

Note by ECE

Introduction

At the meeting of the Bureau of the Subcommittee in September 1994 in New York, the ECE was asked to prepare a note on the issues raised by applying the integrated approach to the presentation of statistical programmes to a global setting.

The ECE was asked to prepare the note because the ECE's Conference of European Statisticians has, since 1993, considered a joint presentation of statistical programmes in that region at their plenary sessions. In 1993, the Joint Presentation included the work programmes only of the ECE, OECD and Eurostat. In 1994 the Joint Presentation included the work of many other international organizations active in international statistics in the ECE-region.

The UN statistical Commission has, for many years, had before it a statement of the statistical programmes of many international organizations but the statements have not been integrated and have had little impact. At the 1993 session the UN secretariat took the original material and presented it as coherently as possible in the circumstances but the contributions were not designed to fit into a given framework with common objectives and so on

Joint Programme Review (ECE, OECD and Eurostat)

The Joint Presentation of Statistical Programmes in the region has been part of a larger effort to ensure coordination and collaboration in international statistical work. For example, the ECE, OECD and Eurostat have annual Joint Programme Reviews where teams from each organization, led by the head of statistics in each case, come together at least once a year to deal with coordination issues. At the first one or two of the Joint Programme Review meetings, the emphasis was on settling misunderstandings or disputes which had not been capable of resolution at the working level. Following those early meetings, the emphasis has been on the more positive process of planning future activities so that each institution and their members may benefit by working closely with the others.

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Joint presentation of programmes

In putting together the integrated presentation of the statistical programmes of organizations working in the ECE region, organizations other than the ECE have been good enough to recast their programmes in the ECE format so that the presentation may be clearly integrated. The integration process has however not been confined simply to expressing existing programmes in this format. For example, for each element in the programme of work, the "objectives" have been reformulated by member countries of the ECE so that they reflect national desires and needs with respect to international statistical cooperation in each field of statistics covered by the work programme. Similarly, the "expected outputs" of each project is intended to refer to the collective output resulting from international statistical cooperation involving the various international organizations working in each field of statistics. In the process of presenting the statistical programmes of work in an integrated fashion, the international organizations cannot fail to be aware of the activities of others which relate to their own activities. Similarly, by having to formulate the objectives of each project, the member countries have heightened their awareness of the numerous activities of the international organizations to which they contribute.

The role of the member countries

It is important to note that the Joint Programme Reviews and the integrated presentation of the statistical work programmes, have the full support of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians as well as other member countries and the secretariats of the international organizations themselves. It is also important to note that the presentation of the various statistical programmes is truly integrated in the sense that the objectives and the outputs are intended to be shared. On the other hand, it remains true that each international organization has its own governing body or bodies and is not formally constrained by any comments or conclusions of the Conference or its members. The Conference of course has its own programme of work which is undertaken by its member countries and by its secretariat which is the Statistical Division of the ECE. Increasingly, however, the Conference has joint activities with other organizations (activities include meetings, data collection and data dissemination).

It is also important to note that the Bureau of the Conference (which includes representatives of the major international organizations) gives much of its time and attention to the integrated presentation and effectively "steers" it.

The integrated presentation of statistical programmes at the global level

The relatively new machinery for collaboration and cooperation in the ECE region has been successful because the member countries and the secretariats felt that it was necessary, were willing to compromise if necessary, and were willing to devote some of their resources to the effort. It is therefore pertinent to ask, do these conditions hold good at the global level?

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Firstly there is the question of whether greater collaboration and cooperation is necessary and whether a joint presentation of programmes would be of assistance? In the Europe/North America case, the need for collaboration has become stronger because of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the increased interest of OECD and Eurostat in member countries of the ECE region which are not members of their organizations. IMF, the World Bank and other world wide institutions also became more active in central and eastern Europe at about the same time. To reformulate the question:- do the international organizations and their member countries believe that their activities throughout the rest of the world are sufficient, and potential sufficiently overlapping, to call for the integrated presentation of their programmes so as to encourage the synergies which have followed in the ECE region?

A second question is:- if those involved believe that activities are overlapping or potentially overlapping sufficiently for such a presentation to be worthwhile, then are they also willing to compromise in order to improve their collective efficiency? And if the answers to the first two questions are in the affirmative then a third question arises:- are they willing to devote some resources to reformatting their programmes in order to fit into a joint presentation?

If it is decided that a joint presentation at the global level would be worthwhile, then the simplest format, and the format which would impose the least burdens on the international organizations which already contribute to the Conference of European Statisticians exercise, would be one which was based on the joint presentation adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians. Thus, the international organizations would not have to repeat the exercise which they have done for the Conference but could simply add to it to encompass their work in other regions of the world. (This is the view not only of ECE Statistical Division, but of Eurostat and the OECD Statistics Directorate)

Conclusion

An integrated approach to the presentation of statistical programmes has been welcome and worthwhile in the ECE region. Whether a similar initiative at the global level would also be worthwhile may depend on the existence of imperatives of a similar kind at the global level, and a similar commitment by the principal parties.

