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ACC SUB-COMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES
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Item 3(a) of the provisional agenda *

COORDINATION OF ON-GOING STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES
(a) New data collection, processing, and dissemination

Report prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division

1. The following provides an account of activities relating to new data collection, processing and dissemination prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division for the areas of international trade, environment statistics, gender statistics as well as general statistics.

I. International trade

(i) HS data

2. Data is now being stored in the Comtrade system according to the Harmonized System, in addition to SITC Revision 1, 2 and 3. All data received from countries for 1994 in HS (67 countries) has been included in the data base. The HS allows users to have more detailed data than the SITC, but the SITC data are still produced and made available for economic analysis. Some rationalization of the SITC data will be necessary later in 1996 and it is our intention to retain only HS and SITC Rev. 2 data as agreed by the Task Force on International Trade Statistics.

* SA/1996/1.

(ii) Quarterly data

3. The quarterly data available in Comtrade is quite limited and not particularly current. There are fewer than 30 countries in Comtrade for any quarter of 1993 and 1994, whereas annual data is included for 91 countries in 1993 and 84 countries in 1994. Continuing efforts to obtain quarterly data from countries have not been successful.

4. The analytical value of this set of data seems limited. It is a mixture of developed countries (24) and some developing countries (8) including a number of developing countries that are small in terms of international trade (4). Actual usage of the data also is limited, based on consultations within the Task Force on International Trade Statistics and based on external requests for trade data. Use has been made of the quarterly data by some organizations to do early estimates of annual trade. However, annual trade data in Comtrade is becoming available much earlier than before so that this use should have declined considerably. The data has also been used to compute quarterly trade index numbers.

5. An alternative source of quarterly data exists for all EU countries from EUROSTAT i.e. for 15 of the 24 developed countries referred to above; it is their CD-ROM product entitled "Intra and extra EU trade".

6. UNSD intends to discontinue compiling quarterly data in Comtrade, and this has been discussed with individual users and in the Task Force on International Trade Statistics. For a limited period UNSD will continue to receive the quarterly tapes from countries as now, and may be able to process a number of them on request if specific needs arise while users develop alternative sources for any needed data.

7. All quarterly data presently in Comtrade will be archived and will be available, on request, on magnetic tape. The resources released will enable UNSD to continue the new initiative of including HS annual data in Comtrade in addition to SITC data.

(iii) Commodity Trade Statistics Series D

8. This publication is discontinued effective 31 December 1995. It was a series of fascicles publishing the annual trade of each country by commodity and value. User needs can still be satisfied by microfiche with the same data (even more detail). The data are also available as tailored extracts from the original data base and on-line from that data base for international organizations.

(iv) Coordination

9. Coordination is complete through the Task Force on International Trade Statistics and no action is required of the Subcommittee

II. Environment

(i) Compendium of Environmental Indicators

10. The Statistical Commission, at its twenty-eight session (27 February - 3 March 1995) approved the proposal by the Inter-governmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics (IGWG) that the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) carry out an international compilation of environmental indicators from national statistical services. UNSD is currently developing a questionnaire based on a core set of environmental indicators specified by the IGWG. UNSD will carry out this compilation of indicators in cooperation with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and regional

commissions covering only non-OECD member states. It is intended to publish a global compendium of environment indicators in 1998.

III. Gender statistics

11. The "Handbook for preparation of national statistical reports on women and men" has been completed in final draft and will be published this fall. It provides guidance for countries interested in preparing national analytical studies similar to the Division's very successful global publication The World's Women -- Trends and Statistics. Suggested indicators, working tables and table formats are given in the fields of population, public life and leadership, education, health, housing and environment. Additional chapters deal with planning and organizing a work programme, how to organize the subject-matter statistics and prepare the analysis, how to prepare the final product in camera-ready form for reproduction, and preparation of a promotion and sales plan.

12. Version 3 of the Women's Indicators and Statistics Database (Wistat) was released in 1995 in the form of spreadsheets on diskettes and an interactive database plus spreadsheets on CD-ROM. The CD-ROM database uses the data retrieval software developed in the Division for the Statistical Yearbook.

13. Once the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics Internet project is operational (see the general statistics section), selected materials from Wistat, The World's Women and other products of the gender statistics programme will be used to establish a gender statistics home page on the Internet worldwide web.

IV. General statistics

14. The third issue of the Statistical Yearbook on CD-ROM is now being completed for release this summer. It incorporates new refinements for use on a LAN and in batch processing mode.

15. Sixteen tables from the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics have been converted to a database for access on the Internet worldwide web in interactive HTML format. (Version 2 of HTML was used. Version 3 was advertised as more adaptable to table formats but was rejected for this application because its table design format is visually very cluttered.) The access programme has been developed with the UN Electronic Services Division and UN Publications. Access is free for a two-month trial period but users must register on the interactive forms provided. It is expected that the service will be converted to a paid subscription basis, starting with the Bulletin's current subscription list. The Statistics Division will follow existing guidelines for free dissemination to national and international statistical services. The Bulletin Internet database is maintained on the Secretariat's central Unix development server and updates will be copied to the Secretariat's Internet server (@un.org) on a regular basis.

V. System of National Accounts 1993

16. The SNA on CD-ROM was prepared in the Division with the support of ISWGNA and will be released in early May 1996. It is based on Microsoft's non-proprietary software Multimedia Viewer, which provides very good search, extract, viewing, hyperlink and windowing functions. All of the SNA tables and accounts can be viewed in the document and are indexed, and they can be exported as spreadsheets.

