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Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2015/216 and past practices, provides an overview of progress achieved in the preparation of the terms of reference of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys. The Intersecretariat Working Group was established by the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session, in 2015, to foster coordination and harmonization of household survey activities. The Commission is invited to take note of progress made on the terms of reference of the Intersecretariat Working Group, its mandate and its governance structure.

* E/CN.3/2016/1.



I. Introduction

1. At its forty-sixth session, in 2015, the Statistical Commission, in its decision 46/105, endorsed the establishment of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys, under the aegis of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in order to foster the coordination and harmonization of household survey activities. The Commission also requested the development of the terms of reference of the Intersecretariat Working Group under the guidance of the Bureau of the Statistical Commission, using the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts as a model, and that the terms of reference be presented to the Commission at its forty-seventh session.

2. In fulfilment of the above request, the present report presents progress made thus far in the development of the terms of reference of the Intersecretariat Working Group. It describes the mandate, governance structure and specific roles/responsibilities of the members of the Intersecretariat Working Group, its management group, its technical working group, its advisory panel and its task forces.

3. The present report also provides information on progress made in the development and piloting of international guidelines for household surveys, the initial area of work for the Intersecretariat Working Group, as requested by the Commission in decision 46/105.

II. Development of the terms of reference of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

4. The World Bank prepared the first draft of the terms of reference of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys in June 2015, using those of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts as a model. Between July and September 2015, the Statistics Division facilitated a series of online consultations to solicit comments on the draft terms of reference from the members of the Intersecretariat Working Group and other stakeholders. The latest draft of the terms of reference is reproduced in paragraphs 5 to 23 below.

A. Rationale and objectives

5. As the main source of social statistics, and of many economic statistics, household surveys are a vital component of every national statistical system. They are a source of information for the compilation of national accounts, consumer price indices and multiple socioeconomic indicators crucial for developing and monitoring country policies and tracking progress towards national and global development targets. They are also widely used for research on development issues. In recent years, the demand for data from social and economic surveys has continued to grow, particularly in developing countries, where administrative systems and other data sources are the weakest and the information gaps remain the largest. With the recent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,¹ it is expected that the demand for social and economic surveys will further increase and that they will remain a critical source of data for monitoring progress towards the Sustainable

¹ General Assembly resolution 70/1, annex.

Development Goals. The global availability of data has significantly improved in both scope and geographic coverage, and methodological advances have been substantial. Large disparities remain, however, with many countries still unable to sustain a long-term programme of high-quality surveys that are comparable over time and compliant with international standards.

6. The key issues with respect to household surveys include the availability and frequency of household survey data; the lack of relevant and timely data; the low reliability and accuracy of household data in many low-income countries; the need for data comparability and coherence within surveys in a given country and across countries; the cost-effectiveness of household surveys; the need for adequate funds; and the accessibility and usability of the data produced through household surveys (see [E/CN.3/2015/10](#)).

7. In order to address the above-mentioned issues, which are both technical and strategic, coordinated action will be required at multiple levels (national, regional and global) by multiple partners (statistical agencies, funding agencies, international organizations, civil society and the private sector) and over different time horizons. It is proposed that the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys be established to oversee the coordination of efforts and harmonization of standards among development partners and across countries as described below.

B. Mandate

8. The mandate of the Intersecretariat Working Group is to foster improvement in the scope and quality of social statistics as delivered through national, regional and international household survey programmes. In accordance with its mandate, the Intersecretariat Working Group will:

(a) Provide a vision for the development of household survey systems to meet the need for social statistics in a rapidly changing data environment and address key issues with respect to household surveys, including those mentioned in paragraph 6 above. This vision can be used as a benchmark for coordination, nationally, regionally and internationally;

(b) Promote coordination and cooperation in the planning, funding and implementation of household surveys;

(c) Provide strategic vision, direction and coordination for the methodological development and implementation of minimum standards and best practice for national, regional and international household survey programmes;

(d) Promote the application of normative international statistical standards, guidelines and other methodological documents and resources on household surveys and coordinate with the agencies developing them. Where appropriate, the Intersecretariat Working Group could have a direct role in the development of proposed standards, guidelines or other documentation for approval through the relevant standard-setting mechanism;

(e) Promote the harmonization of survey methods and instruments where appropriate;

(f) Encourage national and international survey producers to publicly share information on their ongoing and planned surveys;

(g) Promote the documentation, cataloguing and dissemination of household survey datasets and related metadata at the national, regional and international levels, in compliance with international standards and good practices;

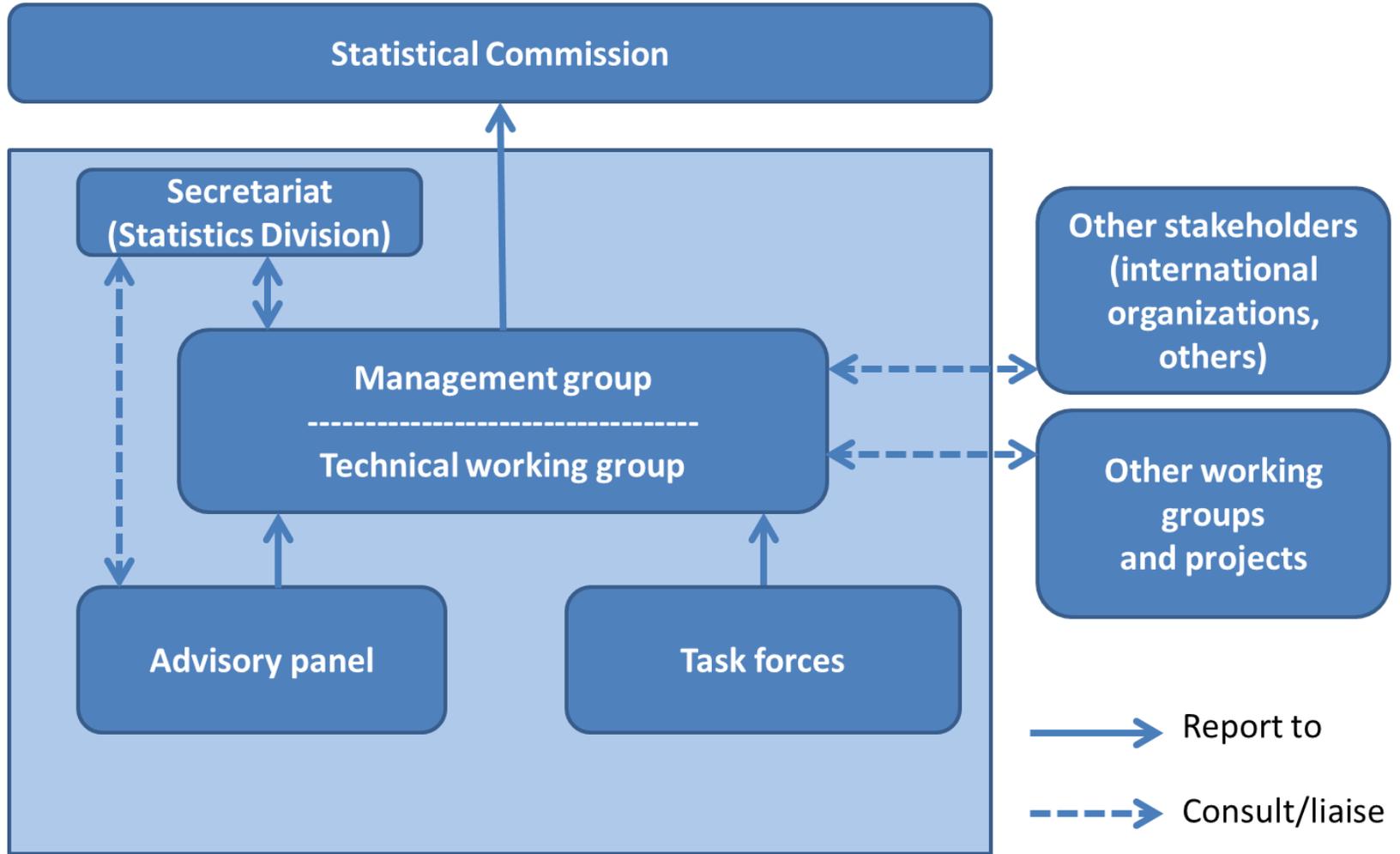
(h) Promote the use of sample survey data in research and policy formulation;

(i) Develop partnerships to provide adequate funding and resources to deliver the capacity-building needed by countries in the implementation of household surveys.

C. Governance structure

9. The major elements of the Intersecretariat Working Group's governance arrangements are shown in the figure below. The boxes in the shaded area represent the bodies of the Intersecretariat Working Group. The entities presented outside the shaded area are established by bodies other than the Intersecretariat Working Group to pursue similar objectives of improving the quality, availability and use of survey data through coordination and collaboration. Where applicable, the Intersecretariat Working Group will coordinate with those entities to take into account their work in its own work programme.

Governance structure of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys



Statistical Commission

10. The Statistical Commission is the entity that provides the mandate of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys, endorses its work programme and monitors the progress of its work.

Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

11. The Intersecretariat Working Group carries out the mandate outlined above and reports progress on its programme of work to the Statistical Commission. The Intersecretariat Working Group is supported by an advisory panel and engages task forces to undertake specific, short-term activities.

12. The Intersecretariat Working Group functions at two levels: the management group and the technical working group.

Management group

13. The management group is composed of seven international organizations: six agencies directly involved in the design and implementation of household surveys (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the World Bank Group and the World Health Organization) and the Statistics Division. The Chair of the group will rotate among the seven organizations. The Statistics Division will serve as secretariat of the group.

14. The function of the management group is to ensure appropriate inputs to and outputs/deliverables from the work of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys and to lay the groundwork for successful outcomes. The members of the management group also act within their own organizations to further the agreed goals and objectives of the Intersecretariat Working Group.

15. The specific tasks and responsibilities of the management group are as follows:

(a) Setting the strategic direction of the work programme of the Intersecretariat Working Group (within the parameters set by the Statistical Commission), ensuring appropriate inputs and outputs and agreeing on desired outcomes;

(b) Reviewing the work programme of the Intersecretariat Working Group proposed by the technical working group and submitting it for endorsement to the Statistical Commission;

(c) Monitoring and implementing the work programme of the task forces (deliverables, schedules, communications strategy);

(d) Raising funds and monitoring budgets, as needed, to support the work programme of the Intersecretariat Working Group;

(e) Identifying emerging issues, risks and opportunities for household surveys and supporting an appropriate coordinated statistical response;

(f) Reporting to the Statistical Commission and communicating with expert groups, as appropriate;

(g) Liaising with national, regional and international stakeholders and users, understanding and managing their expectations and gaining their support;

(h) Endeavouring, collectively and individually, to support the thrust of the above-mentioned tasks and responsibilities.

Technical working group

16. The technical working group is composed of technical experts from the seven agencies represented in the management group, plus experts appointed by the management group.

17. The technical working group facilitates the technical work programme of the Intersecretariat Working Group. In consultation with the advisory panel, the technical working group has the following tasks and responsibilities:

(a) Preparing the work programme for review by the management group;

(b) Promoting the application of existing standards and best practices in the design and implementation of household surveys, where such standards and best practices exist, and supporting the development and adoption of new standards and practices in areas where they do not exist;

(c) Fostering coordination, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of household surveys to ensure that international and regional organizations, donors and recipient countries have clear roles and that their actions are complementary and effective;

(d) Fostering the methodological development of household surveys by proposing and coordinating a research programme on survey methods and by assessing the appropriateness of proposals for new standards and methods;

(e) Preparing, commissioning or supervising the production of manuals and handbooks for guidance and training in the design and implementation of household surveys;

(f) Encouraging national support for the design and implementation of sustainable household survey programmes;

(g) Communicating the policy relevance of household surveys;

(h) Formulating a statistical response on emerging policy issues based on household surveys;

(i) Developing international data collection activities in line with the normative standards and accompanying international recommendations in an efficient and cost-effective way.

Advisory panel

18. An advisory panel is established to support the work of the Intersecretariat Working Group.

19. The advisory panel advises the technical working group on its standing work programme and provides guidance on any other issues upon request from the Intersecretariat Working Group. In particular, the advisory panel:

(a) Evaluates and contributes to manuals and handbooks for guidance and training in the implementation of household surveys and supporting statistics;

(b) Reviews and contributes to the methodological development of household surveys through research and assessment of the appropriateness of proposals for clarification, interpretation and changes to household surveys;

(c) Reviews and contributes to the formulation of communication and dissemination strategies and of statistical responses on emerging policy issues based on household surveys;

(d) Considers proposed international data collection activities in line with the normative standards and accompanying international recommendations in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

20. The composition of the advisory panel reflects the global community of national, regional and international statistical systems and research institutes from all regions of the world and is initially set at 15 members (not including the 7 representatives of the organizations of the Intersecretariat Working Group). The period for which a member is invited to serve on the advisory panel would depend on the particular issue that the Intersecretariat Working Group needed to consider, but it would be at least three years. The advisory panel may also include experts from academia or other organizations.

21. Individuals are invited to become members of the advisory panel based on their expertise in various areas in household surveys. They act on a personal basis, and not as representatives of their organizations. In addition to knowledge in their own area of expertise, members of the advisory panel have a broad grasp of household surveys, enabling them to make a significant contribution to discussions in areas outside their area of expertise.

Task forces

22. The Intersecretariat Working Group may establish task forces to advance research on particular normative and methodological matters or to implement other specific activities. The task forces consist of experts in the relevant area and have a balanced regional representation. The task forces have limited life spans and focus on particular issues. Terms of reference will be formulated for each task force and will include specifications on deliverables, timelines, human and financial resources and work arrangements for monitoring the technical discussions and for reporting recommendations to the Intersecretariat Working Group.

Secretariat

23. The Statistics Division will serve as the secretariat of the Intersecretariat Working Group. The Division will be responsible for the following tasks:

(a) Maintaining the website of the Intersecretariat Working Group;

(b) Preparing reports for the Statistical Commission;

(c) Communicating with the Statistical Commission, countries, regional and international agencies and other stakeholders;

(d) Providing logistical, administrative and other support to the Intersecretariat Working Group.

III. International guidelines for household surveys

24. As requested by the Commission in its decision 46/105, a first priority for the Intersecretariat Working Group will be to make progress on an international code of practice for household surveys. A task force will be established by the management group and technical working group to develop and pilot the standards, based on the proposal made by the World Bank in its report ([E/CN.3/2015/10](#)) to the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session, with the participation of interested national offices in order to take into account existing practices and expertise.

IV. Summary and conclusions

25. **The present report provides an overview of the work undertaken since April 2015 to establish the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys. The Commission is invited to take note of the progress made in the preparation of the terms of reference of the Working Group, in particular its proposed mandate, governance structure and priorities of work.**
