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Items for information: Coordination and integration of statistical programmes

Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities**Report of the Secretary-General***Summary*

This report summarizes the main conclusions of the two 2007 sessions of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities held in New York on 26 February 2007 and in Madrid, from 10 to 11 September 2007, respectively. This item is presented for information. The Commission may wish to take into account in its discussion under relevant agenda items the views expressed by the Committee.

* E/CN.3/2008/1.

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I. Introduction

1. The main objectives of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA), established in September 2002¹, are to promote coordination among the statistical programmes of the international organizations, to provide coordinated preparations for the treatment of statistical issues in intergovernmental meetings, including the Statistical Commission, to foster good practices in the structuring and programming of statistical activities in the international organizations, and ultimately to achieve through the coordination activity an integrated system for data collection.

2. In 2007, the Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities, chaired by the International Labour Organization, held two sessions: its 9th session in New York on 26 February, and its 10th session in Madrid, from 10 to 11 September 2007.²

II. Work of the CCSA

A. Statistical training for staff of international agencies

3. The IMF has continued its work on the implementation of the action plan on training of statisticians in international organizations. The website, containing information on training programmes in international agencies and training material, has been developed and is currently being hosted by the UNSD. Progress was reviewed also in what concerns the development of e-training programmes. There have been a number of promising initiatives, including: the IMF's internal e-training programme; the World Bank's e-learning course on management of statistical development projects (currently under development); the

Development Gateway Foundation's Virtual Statistical System; and two e-courses in statistics developed respectively by Statistics Canada and Statistics Finland.

B. SDMX and costs and benefits of its adoption

4. At its 9th session, the Committee adopted SDMX as standard for data and metadata exchange and requested the sponsors to further examine the implications in terms of resources needed as well as benefits for countries and international agencies that decide to implement it. The cost-benefit assessment based on countries' and agencies' experience was prepared and presented at the 10th session. The assessment covered the benefits to countries and international agencies of adopting SDMX, and the costs associated with its implementation—mainly for technology development and work on the subject matter domains. The results of the assessment indicated that costs for the implementation are minor, but that most developing countries will need assistance to develop their capacity before adopting the standards.

5. The Committee agreed that SDMX would be put forward to the UN Statistical Commission for its consideration, presenting the SDMX as a standard that has been adopted by CCSA and stressing the importance of assisting developing countries to develop their capacity to adopt these standards.

C. Work of the IAEG on the implementation of the ECOSOC Resolution

6. The Committee reviewed progress made by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators (IAEG) in implementing the recommendations by the Friends of the Chair on MDG Indicators and the ones contained in the ECOSOC resolution on Statistical Capacity Building.

In particular, UNSD presented to the Committee a note outlining the work done by the IAEG group to improve the compilation of the indicators and countries' reporting, and to strengthen the coordination of capacity building activities to assist countries in the production of the necessary data. The Committee commended the work of the IAEG and expressed appreciation for the initiative of including a large number of countries in the process.

7. The Committee urged all CCSA agencies members of IAEG, within the context of their mandates and resource availability, to comply with the recommendations made by the Friends of the Chair in their report and those contained in the ECOSOC resolution 2006/9. The Committee also urged its members responsible for the compilation of MDG indicators, to comply with the "Principles governing International Statistical Activities".

D. Data imputations by international agencies

8. As a follow up to the recommendations by the Committee for agencies to comply with the recommendations made by the Friends of the Chair in their report and those contained in the ECOSOC resolution, ECE conducted a review of issues and concerns related to the use of imputations of missing national values in international data series. In particular, the ECOSOC resolution 2006/9 calls for "avoiding imputation unless specific country data are available for reliable imputations following consultations with concerned countries and through transparent methodologies".

9. The Committee reviewed and discussed the proposals put forward in the paper on how to implement the ECOSOC resolution and agreed on the following: 1) the issue of imputation of country data should be included in the quality assurance framework for international statistics; 2) imputations should be clearly flagged out in the database; 3) full transparency of the process

and methods of estimation should be ensured; 4) consultations with national statistical authority should always be carried out and seen as part of the process to ensure transparency; 5) the existing CCSA task team on international quality assurance frameworks, will review ways to integrate this issues into the frameworks.

E. Use of population estimates

10. As part of the work on the improvement of the quality of data in international sources and increased transparency of methods used by international agencies, the Committee also reviewed issues related to the use of population figures. At the 10th session of the Committee, ESCAP presented a note on concerns related to the use of population estimates and on the possible underlying reasons for discrepancies among different sets of data used by agencies, which are due in general to the original sources of information and definitions used.

11. The Committee agreed that the Population Division should engage in a more extensive consultation with countries and established a task team with the following tasks: 1) review and recommend ways to improve the consultation with countries in the process of producing national estimates; 2) indicate to agencies how to factor in changes in the population figures from one revision to the next; 3) discuss ways to address the concern that there are no internationally agreed standards for annual population statistics.

F. Modalities of data sharing between international organizations

12. The Committee discussed modalities of data sharing between international organizations and related current limitations and problems, based on a paper prepared by ECE. The Committee agreed that currently the exchange of data among agencies is working relatively well. In particular, it was noted that progress had been made to limit the burden to countries

avoiding sending similar requests by different agencies. However, recognizing that some issues and limitations still existed, especially in connection to the extent to which data provided by a partner agency can then be re-used in other statistical outputs, it was agreed that UNECE, in consultation with the World Bank and ECB would prepare a paper, to be discussed by CCSA in 2008, to outline good practices for data exchange among international agencies.

G. Special session on the implementation of quality assurance frameworks

13. In conjunction with its 10th session, CCSA held a special session on “Implementation of quality assurance frameworks”. The quality assurance frameworks (or frameworks for statistics production) have the objective to establish, in a specific statistical organisation, a system of coordinated methods and tools guaranteeing the adherence to minimum requirements concerning the statistical processes and products. Some member agencies presented their initiatives in applying the guidelines prepared by the task team on quality assurance. The Committee agreed that the United Nations Statistics Division would host a webpage for the exchanging of information on peer reviews, providing links to the agencies’ sites.

14. The Committee agreed to fully endorse the quality guidelines prepared by Eurostat to facilitate the implementation of quality assurance frameworks in international organisations. The quality assurance framework for international organisations will contribute to the effective compliance of international statistical and international organisations with the CCSA Principles, thus enhancing the credibility of international statistics.

15. In connection with the implementation of the quality assurance frameworks, the Committee also discussed plans for the next CCSA Conference on Quality for International

Agencies, to be held, in Rome in July 2008, back-to-back, as usual, with the corresponding Eurostat conference for national statistical offices.

H. Coordination of technical cooperation activities

16. At its 10th session, the Committee also held a special session on Statistical Capacity Building. At its 8th Session, in 2006, the Committee had agreed to form four Task Teams to further the work on some specific areas of interest and explore ways for CCSA members to improve coordination and effectiveness of their initiatives. The teams are as follows:

Task Team 1 – Reporting mechanisms on statistical capacity building activities, led by Paris 21 (ECE, Eurostat, World Tourism Organization, World Bank, Paho)

Task Team 2 – Capacity building through regional training initiatives for national statisticians (and regional training centers), led by UNSD (ILO, FAO, Paris21)

Task Team 3 – Review of modalities for coordination of technical cooperation programmes at the sub-regional level, led by the World Bank (USND, Eurostat, ESCWA, African Development Bank, World Tourism Organization)

Task Team 4 – Assessment of the effectiveness of capacity building activities in Africa, led by UNSD (WHO, Paris21, World Bank, African Development Bank)

17. During the special session, the task teams presented the results of their first year of work. The work of Task Team 1 (convened by PARIS21) received appreciation. The Committee also noted that the work done so far was largely based on the PARIS21 light reporting mechanism and requested that the report for the February 2008 session of CCSA present the Task Team's progress with respect to all of its terms of reference. Task Team 2 presented an inventory of

training activities and centers. Given that activities by international agencies would be normally reported by Task Team 1 and other regional initiatives would be covered by Task Team 3, the Committee agreed this Task Team would focus only on training centers with a regional reach, including both regional centers and national centers providing training to official statisticians from outside the country.

18. In connection with this agenda item, other agencies presented their initiatives for the development of training tools. In particular, the World Bank presented an update of its project for the development of an e-learning course on “Investing in statistical capacity”. The course is intended for those who have responsibility for the management of statistical capacity building activities in developing countries. Eurostat also introduced its “Guide to Statistics in EC Development Cooperation”, developed to support the European Commission staff in using statistics and indicators in their development programmes, identifying and designing activities for statistical capacity building and in understanding statistics for policy making.

19. Task Team 3 reported that progress had not been made on agreeing on a set of recommendations for good practices in the design and management of technical cooperation programmes to be put forward for consideration by CCSA. The Committee agreed that Task Team 3 would prepare a brief report for the February 2008 session and a more extensive one for the September 2008 session.

20. Finally, Task Team 4 presented the results of the first phase of their work. The lead agency compiled a list of areas and related elements to monitor statistical capacity by both quantitative and qualitative indicators. The Committee agreed that the number of areas considered in the assessment was too large and that the focus should be on quantitative

indicators only. Given the work already being undertaken by the African Development Bank in this area, the committee agreed that they were to take the lead to continue the work of this task team, together with ECA.

H. Review of CCSA functions

21. At its 10th Session, the Committee reviewed its functions and ways of operating, based on a note prepared by the chair, ILO, and the secretariat, UNSD. The proposals to the committee were organized in five areas as follows:

Membership and level of representation

22. The Committee discussed whether membership should be extended to any agency/organization with statistical activities and all members should have equal status and to what level the agency should be represented in the Committee. It was agreed that the current list of members should be maintained and that requests for new memberships could be assessed on the basis of the new TORs and objective of CCSA, to be redrafted and approved later. Members will be free to opt for an observer status. They further agreed that the level of representation should be maintained, and strongly encouraged to be at the director level.

Activities and meetings

23. The Committee reviewed issues related to the organization of its meetings and side events. It agreed that side events will have to be limited in number and will have to be organized by the relevant agencies with no assistance by the secretariat. On the presentation of items during the regular sessions, the Committee agreed that there should be a clear distinction between items for discussion and items for information and that there should be no fixed time limit for the presentation and discussion. The Committee also agreed that in between sessions,

the Secretariat should remind members of their commitments to produce outputs and reports, as agreed at the CCSA meetings.

Decision mechanisms

24. The Committee agreed that consensus will be determined by the chair as reported in the minutes of the meeting. A suggestion was also made to include a list of actions by members or task teams, agreed by the Committee at each session.

Reporting

25. The discussion focused on whether CCSA should report to other entities—such as UNSC or CEB and on whether or not the Committee should have an identity as a body. There was agreement that CCSA should not be formally accountable to the UNSC. However, it was agreed that CCSA should report back to the Commission to communicate important decisions and key issues and should get recognition of its work and decisions. It was also agreed that there is a need for the Committee to be more visible. In this respect it was agreed that all members should give the chair special recognition at events they organize.

Management and organization

26. The Committee reviewed and discussed the current way of operating of the chair and secretariat and agreed on the proposal of a two-chair system. It further agreed that there would be no financial assistance to the secretariat, but that on an ad hoc basis the secretariat could seek the assistance of other members. The task teams will continue to operate as they currently are and the outputs they produce will remain property of the task team's members only. Finally, the Committee agreed that the secretariat and two co-chairs would redraft the TORs and

include both a mission statement and a vision statement. The new draft will be circulated to the members for their written suggestions and corrections. The new TORs would then be adopted at the February 2008 session.

I. Other issues

27. At its tenth session, the Committee was informed by OECD of outcome of the second OECD World Forum on "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy", where participants discussed ways to measure progress in societies.

28. The Committee considered the need to revise the current classification of statistical activities and agreed that the United Nations Statistics Division, assisted by the UN regional commissions and OECD, would propose a revised classification.

Annex I

Participating agencies and offices

9th Meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (New York, 26 February 2007)

United Nations entities programmes and funds

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Statistics Division
United Nations Population Division

Economic Commission for Africa

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Economic Commission for Europe

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

United Nations Children's Fund

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

United Nations Development Programme/HDR

United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Population Fund

Specialized agencies and related organizations

International Labour Organization

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

World Health Organization

PAHO/World Health Organization

World Bank

International Monetary Fund

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

World Trade Organization

Other international and non-governmental organizations

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Statistical Office of the European Communities

Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

African Development Bank

Asian Development Bank

European Central Bank

PARIS 21

ECOWAS

Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics

CARICOM

Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries

**10th Meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities
(Madrid, 10-11 September 2007)**

United Nations entities programmes and funds

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Statistics Division
United Nations Population Division

Economic Commission for Africa

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Economic Commission for Europe

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Population Fund

Specialized agencies and related organizations

International Labour Organization

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

World Health Organization

World Bank

International Monetary Fund

World Tourism Organization

World Trade Organization

International Atomic Energy Agency

Other international and non-governmental organizations

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Statistical Office of the European Communities

Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

African Development Bank

European Central Bank

PARIS 21

Bank for International Settlements

Notes

¹ The Committee was established to continue to carry out functions previously performed by the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities—a subsidiary body of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).

² A complete list of participating agencies in both sessions is attached as Annex 1.