

Concept Note

Regional thematic conferences on “Managing a statistical organization in times of change”

Purpose and background

This series of regional thematic conferences will be organized to understand further and prioritize the emerging needs of statistical organizations to adapt and develop, as stressed in the **Cape Town Global Action Plan (CTGAP)** for Sustainable Development¹ and in the final report of the series of conferences on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics.² In particular, the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and related regional and national development policies requires national statistical systems to grasp the potential of innovative technologies in a rapidly changing data ecosystem while reinforcing leadership, coordination, communication and dialogue through institutional and organizational reforms, in compliance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, endorsed by the General Assembly in 2014. Modernization, transformation and adaptation are crucial if official statistics are to meet the widening and increasing requirements of policymakers, researchers, the media and civil society for high-quality, timely and disaggregated statistics.

The fourth edition of the Handbook of Statistical Organization, enacted by the 52nd session of the UNSC in March 2021, aims to guide chief statisticians, senior managers, and staff members of statistical organizations to develop and maintain national statistical capacity that is fit for purpose. As for the previous series of the Handbook, the 4th edition, renamed **Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems** (the Handbook³), is a non-prescriptive compendium providing guidance and informing statistical organizations on critical issues and topics, including new and emerging ones while acknowledging the diversity and specificity of national contexts. The Handbook was designed as a living document to be updated and revised at regular intervals under the guidance of an advisory group⁴ to ensure a link with the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant bodies. The Statistical Commission also suggested this approach be complemented with a series of thematic conferences at the regional and sub-regional levels, at which senior statisticians may address recent institutional, organizational and technical developments addressing future challenges and opportunities for the production of official statistics and indicators.

¹ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/cape-town-global-action-plan/> and E/CN.3/2017/3 and E/CN.3/2018/4.

² See E/CN.3/2017/5.

³ See <https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/handbook/index.cshtml>

⁴ Members of the Advisory Group are Brazil, Columbia, Ghana, Kenya, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Poland, South Africa, Suriname, the United Kingdom, Palestine, FAO, ILO, UNCTAD, the Asian Development Bank, Eurostat, Open Data Watch, PARIS21, SESRIC and the five regional commissions of the United Nations.

Objective of the regional thematic conferences

The main objective of regional thematic conferences is to understand better and prioritize the emerging needs of statistical organizations to adapt and develop and exchange experiences and strategies of Member States in such processes. The regional approach will emphasize aspects of this process that are typical for the selected region and represent common challenges among members of that region.

This will also allow the organizers to collect additional information on practices, success stories and challenges at national level but also initiatives at regional level to support and guide the modernization and transformation of national statistical systems. The Handbook was designed as a living document to guide chief statisticians and senior managers in developing, adapting and maintaining statistical organizations to meet users' needs in a swift evolving data ecosystem and technological development.

It is proposed that the thematic conferences concentrate on four themes, addressing how to:

1. Strengthen the institutional and organizational frameworks of national statistical systems; including the role of national statistical offices as leaders and coordinators of these systems, as well as their partnerships with government, academia, civil society, private sector and other stakeholders; (linked to CTGAP Strategic Area 1)
2. Support the transformation and modernization of statistical production architecture and technology and integrate innovative sources of data to produce high-quality statistics disaggregated by all characteristics to ensure no one is left behind (linked to CTGAP Strategic Area 2 and 3)
3. Engage with users' communities to develop and promote policies, innovative strategies and integrated dissemination platforms to ensure communication and use of official statistics and data for sustainable development (linked to CTGAP Strategic Area 4)
4. Ensure the most effective means of mobilizing resources, coordinating efforts and developing multi-stakeholder partnerships to support the implementation of country-owned strategies and programmes for the development of official statistics and monitoring of the 2030 sustainable agenda and related regional/national initiatives (linked to CTGAP Strategic Area 5 and 6)

Time and venue

A series of **eight (8)** thematic conferences are expected to be held between May 2019 and December 2023. The suggested regions to cover are as follows:

1. Africa region
 - **Two** conferences
 - 28 Anglophone and Lusophone countries⁵ + 26 Francophone countries⁶
 - Financing shared with ECA and host countries
 - Date/venue: Pretoria, South Africa – 7-9 October 2019 (for English-speaking countries); Morocco, date tbd (for French-speaking countries)
2. Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) region
 - **One** conference, 12 countries⁷
 - Financing shared with Eurostat
 - Date/venue: Tashkent, Uzbekistan, date tbd
3. Arab-speaking region
 - **One** conference, 22 countries⁸
 - Date/venue: Ramallah, Palestine – 29 November – 1 December 2022
4. Asia region (excluding EECCA and Arab-speaking region)
 - **Two** conferences
 - 24 Asian countries⁹ + 20 Pacific Island countries
 - Financing shared with Asian Development Bank
 - Date/venue: Manila, Philippines – 12-14 February 2020 (for Asian countries); tbd for Pacific Island countries
5. Americas region
 - **Two** conferences
 - 16 Caribbean¹⁰ + 17 South/Central American countries
 - Financing shared with Inter-American Development Bank and Caribbean Development Bank

⁵ Angola, Botswana, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

⁶ Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Togo and Tunisia.

⁷ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

⁸ Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

⁹ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, China Hong Kong SAR, Chian Macao SAR, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.

¹⁰ Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Bahamas, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands (UK), Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos Islands.

- Date/venue: Bridgetown, Barbados – 25-27 November 2019 (for the Caribbean); tbd (for South/Central American countries)

Participants

The regional thematic conferences target Heads of national, regional and international statistical agencies. The organizers may finance the participation of Heads/Chief Statisticians of national statistical agencies of less developed countries. Multilateral and bilateral donors active in the respective regions should also have the opportunity to participate and contribute.

The plan is to invite 2 delegates from each Member State, namely the Head of the Statistical Office and a second senior representative of the national statistical system.

To facilitate discussion, the number of participants at each conference should be limited, which requires conducting two conferences in some regions.

Organization of sessions and expected outcome

The thematic conferences will be held over 2 to 3 days and will provide an opportunity to discuss issues relevant to specific regions with the main stakeholders (Chief Statisticians, other organizations of the national statistical system, partners and regional organizations).

The conferences will include breakout sessions for which participants will be split into smaller groups to discuss concrete outputs and recommendations under the four themes. The outcome of the breakout sessions will then be shared and discussed in plenary with the invention of selected panellists.

It is essential that during the 2 to 3 days of each Regional Conference, all participants from regional and global statistical agencies, as well as from multilateral and bilateral donors, actively participate.

Budget and resources

The financial contribution for the organization of the cycle of Regional Thematic Conferences on “Managing a statistical organization in times of change” depends on the number of regional/sub-regional conferences held and on the extent they will be organized back-to-back with other statistical events and meetings. Therefore, the costs for each conference could be between USD 30,000 and 70,000, including funding for selected member countries, consultants and travel costs of UNSD officials. These amounts do not include contributions in-kind such as meeting facilities and interpretation from UN regional commissions and other hosting organizations that would also be in charge, under the guidance of the co-organizers, of the logistics and proceedings of the Conferences.

ANNEX

1. Strengthen the institutional and organizational frameworks of national statistical systems; including the role of national statistical offices as leaders and coordinators of these systems, as well as their partnerships with government, academia, civil society, private sector and other stakeholders; (linked to CTGAP Strategic Area 1)

- Engage in communication and advocacy activities at the policy-making level to raise awareness and understanding of institutional and organizational arrangements supporting the collection, sharing, and communication of sustainable development data and statistics.
- Conduct reviews and create frequent and periodic opportunities to consult with all stakeholders on the effectiveness of the governance and coordination mechanisms for collecting, sharing, and communicating sustainable development data and statistics within national statistical systems.
- Streamline the integration of findings and recommendations from national reviews and multi-stakeholder consultations into i) national strategies for the development of statistics; ii) sector development plans and priorities; and iii) work programmes of national statistical systems.
- Develop the institutional arrangements, including the revision of statistical regulatory frameworks, that are needed for public-private cooperation and partnerships, including the use of data from non-traditional sources, in accordance with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.
- Encourage national statistical offices to embrace the open data initiative, clarify and support the role of the national statistical systems in this initiative and ensure stakeholders outside the national statistical system are actively involved in the process.
- Develop learning material, and update guidelines and handbooks such as the Handbook of Statistical Organization to provide guidance and best practices to achieve a modern, more integrated and coordinated national statistical system.

2. Support the transformation and modernization of statistical production architecture and technology and integrate innovative sources of data and information to produce high-quality data disaggregated by all characteristics to ensure no one is left behind (linked to CTGAP Strategic Area 2 and 3)

- Encourage statistical organizations to apply generic standards and models of statistical production to allow the development and use of common innovative technologies for data collection, processing, dissemination and analysis for sustainable development at global, regional, national and sub-national levels.
- Modernize statistical infrastructure and standards such as SDMX to facilitate data integration and automation of data and metadata exchange across various stages of the statistical production process and at all levels (global, regional, national and sub-national).
- Strengthen and expand household survey programmes, integrated survey systems, business and other economic survey programmes, population and housing census programmes, civil registration and vital statistics programmes and the International Comparison Programme considering the needs posed by the 2030 Agenda.
- Improve the quality of national statistical registers and expand the use of administrative records by integrating them with data from surveys and other new data sources to compile integrated social, economic and environmental statistics and indicators in relation to the 2030 Agenda.
- Promote and mainstream the integration of modern geospatial information management systems within statistical production programmes and encourage the use and adoption of technologies that promote the integration of geospatial and statistical information.
- Support the work of the UN Global Expert Group on Big Data for Official Statistics in investigating the benefits and challenges of Big Data based on best practices of public and private initiatives, and eventually propose a common technology infrastructure and a Global Platform for Data, Services and Applications to be shared by official statisticians, data scientists and domain experts from the public and private sector for the monitoring and reporting on the sustainable development goals.
- Develop guidelines and training material on the use of new and innovative data generated outside the official statistical system into official statistics for monitoring and reporting on sustainable development goals.

3. Engage with users' communities to develop and promote policies, innovative strategies and integrated dissemination platforms to ensure proper communication and use of official statistics, and data for sustainable development (linked to CTGAP Strategic Area 4)

- Encourage the development of effective communication and data dissemination strategies and guidelines for public and private dialogue oriented to policymakers, legislators, the media, the general public, the economy, etc.
- Promote the development of integrated database systems to support the efficient and effective dissemination and utilization of data and statistics for the review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development implementation process, building, where possible, on existing dissemination platforms.
- Promote the adoption of policies and technical solutions for micro-data archiving, allowing wide access and use of this data for sustainable development monitoring and research purposes.
- Develop and implement educational programmes to increase data literacy and data misuse recognition and empower institutions and individuals to use statistics effectively in their own decisions.
- Leverage the use of e-learning platforms to share knowledge between producers and users of statistics.

4. Ensure the most effective means of mobilizing resources, coordinating efforts and developing multi-stakeholder partnerships to support the implementation of country-owned strategies and programmes for the development of official statistics; in particular, for monitoring of the 2030 sustainable agenda and related regional/national initiatives (linked to CTGAP Strategic Area 5 and 6)

- Support countries in implementing the SDG indicator framework through an integrated National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) and engage in communication and advocacy activities at the policy-making level to raise awareness and understanding of implementation aspects of the indicator framework.
- Provide an overview at country level of financial, technical and human capacity needs for the implementation of the NSDS and consider appropriate matches between types of support and types of needs.
- Coordinate the mobilization of own national resources for the implementation of the NSDS and eventually identify resource gaps and mobilize donor support towards the priorities agreed in the national and regional statistical strategies, including through south-south and triangular cooperation programmes.
- Promote nationally and/or regionally-owned coordination mechanisms of capacity-building initiatives and create opportunities for participation of non-state actors in funding statistical activities through innovative financing mechanisms using means consistent with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.
- Promote the sharing of relevant implementation experiences between countries at regional and global levels.