

## **Development Account: 6<sup>th</sup> Tranche**

**Strengthening statistical capacity  
in support of progress towards the Internationally  
Agreed Development Goals in South Asia**

**United Nations Statistics Division**

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## Executive Summary

<b>Project Title:</b>	Strengthening statistical capacity in support of progress towards the internationally agreed development goals in South Asia
<b>Duration:</b>	3 years (2008-2010)
<b>Location:</b>	Countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
<b>Executing Agency:</b>	The project will be executed by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)
<b>National Counterpart Institutions:</b>	National Statistical Offices
<b>Approval by the General Assembly:</b>	<p>Recognizing the importance of the high quality statistical data, and their effective use, in promoting the evidence-based socio-economic policies and achieving internationally agreed goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the overall objective of this project is to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems in the South Asia region to enable them to meet their statistical needs and to improve the production and analysis, on a regular basis, of benchmark statistics required for national development planning and for monitoring of the internationally agreed developments goals.</p> <p>Through the use of information and communications technology, the project will also promote inter-regional cooperation among the countries of the region in the field of statistics and will establish a platform for communication and data exchange. It will increase access to freely accessible websites providing development indicators for policymakers and the user community at large.</p> <p>The substantive focus of the programme lies in the areas of collection, compilation, dissemination and analysis of socio-economic development indicators, including the MDG indicators. In particular the project seeks to improve data collection methods and strategies in socio-economic statistics, such as censuses, statistical surveys, including surveys of businesses and households, administrative data sources and business registers; enhance quality and reliability of statistics produced; and analyze how these impact on the final monitoring capacity of countries. The project will also strengthen the organization of the integrated statistical systems and user-producer relations and the use of ICT. Advisory services, study tour programmes and a series of sub-regional events (expert groups and training workshops) will constitute the core activities under this project framework.</p>

# **1. Background and relationship to MDGs and the Medium Term Plans**

## **1.1 Background**

1. The overall project objective is to strengthen the capacity of countries and relevant regional institutions in South Asia for producing on a regular basis reliable, harmonized with the international statistical standards and good practices, high quality socio-economic development indicators, which are policy relevant and meet the increasing demands of national, regional and international users. The project aims also at significantly enhancing the availability and improving the dissemination of those indicators required for socio-development planning and for monitoring of the internationally agreed goals in South Asia. The project will foster the networking within the region through interactive sharing and management of knowledge and will strengthen the links between producers and users of statistics.

2. The availability of good quality statistics and the capacity of governments, donors and international organizations to systematically measure, monitor and report reliable statistics and indicators lies at the heart of development policy and the achievement of the internationally agreed goals, including the MDGs. In recent years, the MDGs have succeeded in raising awareness of the importance of statistics for evidence-based policy making. However, the current situation of statistical services constrains the effectiveness and achievement of national development planning and policy in many countries, especially in the poorest ones, where effective development policy interventions matter most. A substantial gap still exists between the need for statistics and monitoring tools and the ability of most countries in South Asia to routinely provide them.

3. The importance of strengthening national statistical capacity was recently emphasized by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Resolution 2006/6. This project is in accordance with the resolution's request that the United Nations support national efforts in building and strengthening statistical capacity.

4. The project will be executed by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP).

## **1.2 Relationship to MDGs and the programme budget**

5. The project is consistent with the scope and priorities of the Strategic Framework for the period 2008-2009, and linked directly to the internationally agreed development goals, the Millennium Development Goals, and major UN conferences and summits: Subprogramme 5 (Statistics) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Subprogramme 2 (Statistics) of ESCAP; General Assembly resolutions A/RES/55/162 and A/RES/56/95 and ECOSOC resolution 2006/6 (E/2006/INF/2/Add.1).

6. In its resolution A/RES/55/162, the General Assembly "reiterates the call to assess, on a regular basis, progress towards implementing the Millennium Declaration". In its resolution A/RES/56/95, the General Assembly "requests the Secretary-General to prepare, drawing upon the road map (...) an annual report and a comprehensive report every five years on progress achieved by the United Nations system and Member States towards implementing the Millennium Declaration (...)". As a follow-up to the

decisions of the General Assembly, the United Nations Secretariat and other international agencies have identified indicators for the monitoring of the implementation of the development goals and targets set out in the Declaration. In line with EC-ESA's recommendation that the 6<sup>th</sup> tranche of the Development Account should be "Supporting progress towards the internationally agreed development goals, through knowledge-management, networking and partnerships", this project is then proposed.

### **1.3 Lessons learned**

7. The recent report of the Secretary-General to the thirty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission on strengthening national capacity in statistics (E/CN.3/2007/14, para.23) presents the progress in building statistical capacity in countries and lists the efforts made by the Statistics Division for improving south-south collaboration and building networks of statisticians in regions and sub-regions. By taking the regional project approach, the UNSD efforts to create a strong statistical community have become more holistic, allowing for more systematic and result oriented interventions.

8. The project builds upon lessons learned from five statistical development projects implemented or being implemented by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in the Caribbean Community (Caricom), Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) regions. All these projects were successful in strengthening the regional network of statisticians, increasing intra-regional statistical cooperation and overall raising the regional profile of statistics. They also provided these regions with an impetus in statistical capacity building as seen by the number of region-led follow up projects.

## **2. Problem Analysis**

### **2.1 Users analysis**

9. National statistical systems in countries of South Asian are still under developed due to institutional and technical barriers. Statistical coordination at national level needs major improvement. In most countries in the region, statistical laws are not yet well established or not always implemented. There is a need to raise awareness among policy makers on the importance of reliable and timely statistical data for national policies and for the need to commit resources for the development of statistical systems.

10. Statistical activities such as surveys and censuses are commonly not implemented as planned due to lack of financial resources or, in some cases, due to late release of allocated funds. One of the main reasons for the financial problems identified in countries is that National Statistical Offices (NSOs) rely mainly on government funding which fluctuates according to other government priorities. Yet, it should be noted that statistical data and information are public goods and should be provided as such. Building capacity on implementation of integrated approach to compilation of basic economic statistics for various types of economic activities and strengthening the demographic and social statistics is also imperative for the improvement of statistics in the region, yielding to the calculation of better development indicators, including for the monitoring of the MDGs.

11. Regarding the status of compilation of benchmark statistics in South Asia, some progress has been made in developing them, however, the coverage, reliability, periodicity, and timelines of data remain weak. There is also a lack of a consistent methodology for the collection and compilation of basic economic statistics such as industrial statistics, distributive trade statistics, construction statistics, energy statistics and tourism statistics. Issues of considerable concerns are also related to the quality of those data, particularly ones which will be used for national accounts purposes, and the timeliness with which they are produced by most of the countries. Only few of the countries have adopted international statistical standards such as activity and product classifications, and the 1993 System of National Accounts or implemented other relevant international recommendations on methods of data compilation at the required level.

12. Building capacity and improvement in the areas of demographic and social statistics is also crucial for the calculation of better development indicators, including for the monitoring of MDGs. National Statistical Systems, in particular National Statistical Offices, have an urgent need for more technical capacity for the collection, analysis and dissemination of data from surveys, population censuses and administrative sources, especially in the areas of household budget survey and labour statistics. The project envisages a number of activities which will assist countries in alleviation of the problems and will result in an increased ability to compile a high quality basic socio-economic statistics on a sustainable basis.

13. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) offers a wide range of new possibilities for NSOs to develop efficiently and also to meet some of their financial needs. However, the resource constraints hinder the development of new technical skills, thus preventing NSOs to exploit the full potentials of ICT. The new information technology has also brought new concerns regarding the management of information technology environment and this requires highly specialized skills that are not commonly found in these countries. It is expected that the proposed project will help reduce such problems and facilitate the establishment of a network of experts in the region through which countries will share and gain experience on the use of ICT to improve efficiency of staff through better information management and for their core functions such as data compilation and data dissemination.

14. Users of official statistics, such as universities and research institutes, could be involved in training, including as local resource persons to some of the meetings, so as to promote sustainable capacity building.

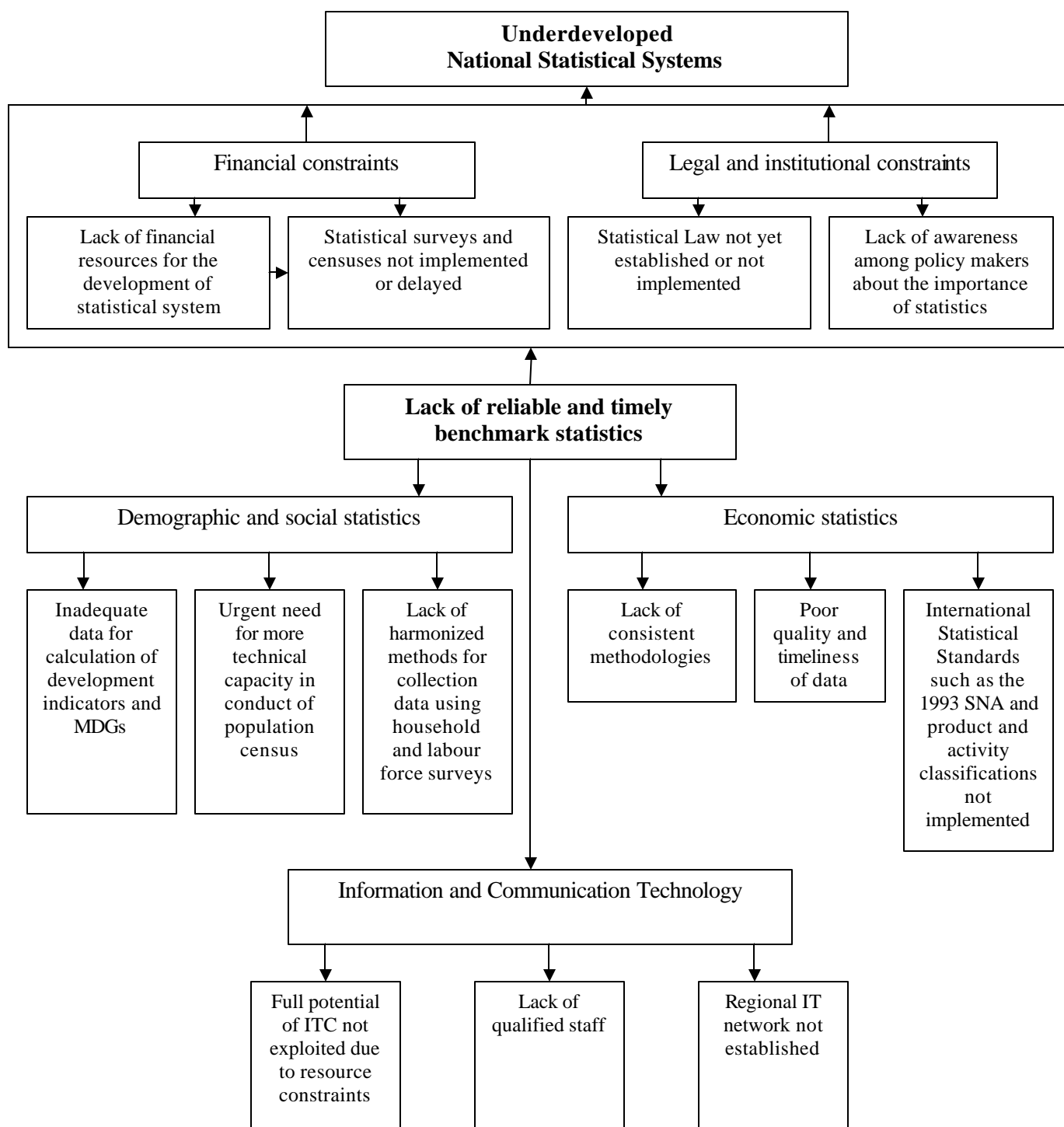
## **2.2 Objective analysis**

15. The project will attempt to tackle the problems highlighted above first from its root by raising awareness among policy makers on the importance of reliable and timely statistics, train countries in statistical organization and management with the particular aim to provide them with marketing tools necessary to attract funding from government and other sources as well as generate revenues from statistical product. The project will also foster the use of Internet-based applications in statistical production at all stages of the statistical activity, including a broader dissemination of statistical products and possibly will increase revenue to support statistical budget.

16. The project is expected to improve the inter-regional cooperation and coordination in statistical operation, through facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experiences, and the sharing of good practices on key strategic areas, including statistical organization and management, and the adoption of

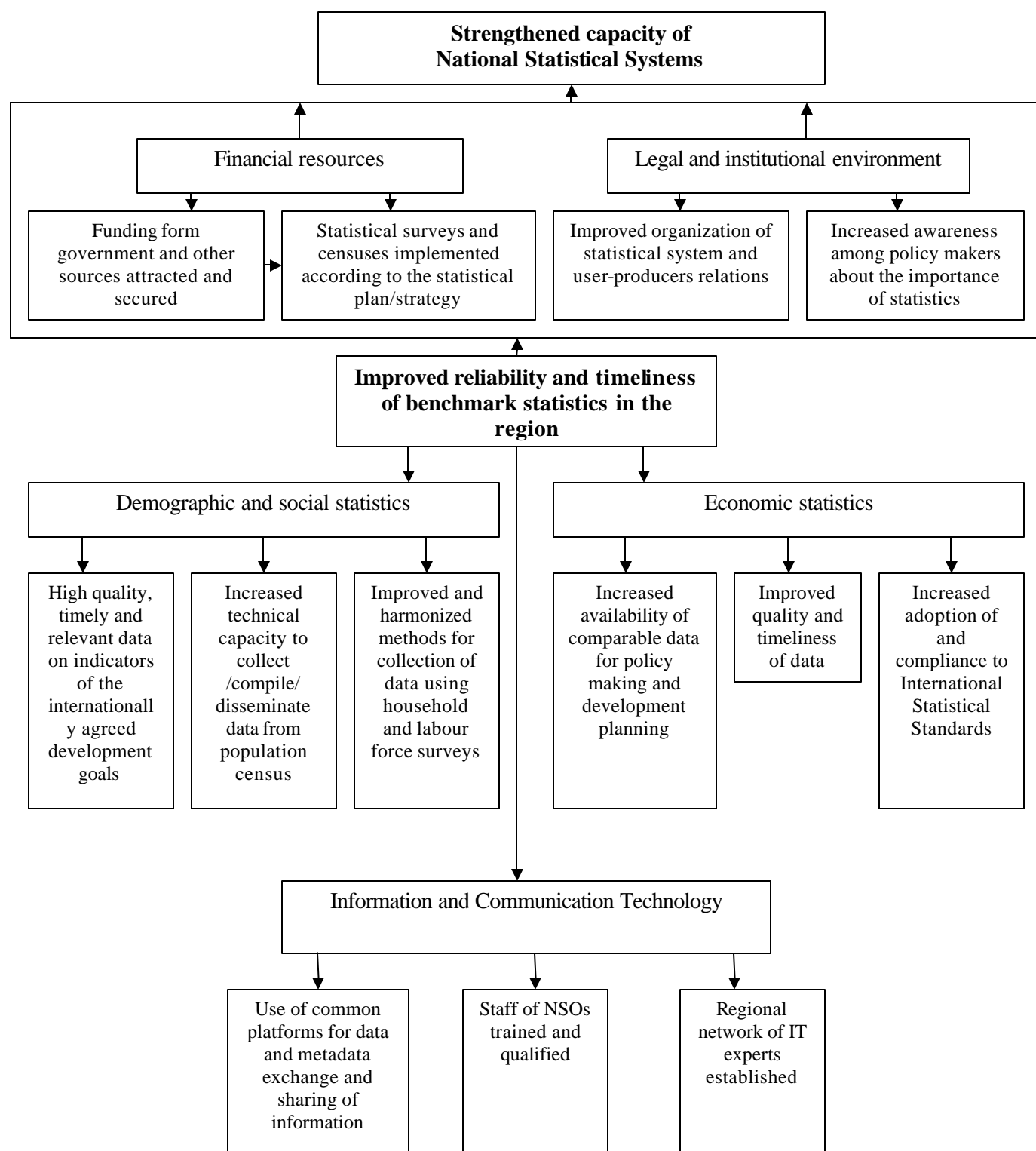
international statistical methods, standards and classifications in the production of socio-economic statistics. By promoting the use of common methodologies and classifications, the project will improve the availability of standardized and comparable information in the region for policy making and development planning.

## 2.3 Problem tree





## 2.4 Objective tree



### **3. Project objective, expected accomplishments and strategy**

#### **3.1 Objective**

17. The project objective is to strengthen the capacity of countries and relevant regional institutions in South Asia, for the production and analysis, on a regular basis, of benchmark statistics required for national development planning and for the monitoring of the progress of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

#### **3.2 Expected accomplishments**

18. The implementation of the project is expected to result in:

- (a) Improved organization of the statistical systems and user-producers relations, resulting in quality, timely and relevant data on indicators of internationally agreed development goals;
- (b) Increased adoption of international statistical methods and standards for knowledge management in relation to the measurement of progress towards the internationally agreed development goals.

#### **3.3 Overall Strategy**

19. The project will strive to achieve the two main expected accomplishments through a combination of the main activities, in particular, through workshops on organization of statistical systems, user-producer relationships, collection, compilation and dissemination of socio-economic statistics; harmonization of production and dissemination of development indicators, including MDGs; as well as through technical assistance and other meetings. The project aims towards the increased adoption of international statistical methods and standards, in better national statistical system settings, resulting in quality, timely and relevant data on internationally agreed development goals.

20. Technical assistance within the project framework will be provided to countries on a need basis, upon approval by the Steering Committee. In addition, study tours will be organized to encourage and facilitate the adoption of international statistical methods and standards, through regional benchmarking and sharing of experience with peers in the region. Such peer exchanges have proven to be a very effective method of regional cooperation and create long-term relationships between national statistical systems beyond the scope of the specific topics of the visit.

21. The establishment of an IT network will aim to provide a forum for technical dialogue among countries in the region in order to promote knowledge management in the form of common platforms for data and metadata exchange and the sharing of information on methodologies and statistical practices. This initiative will be composed of mainly two parts:

- a. Bringing technical level national experts together in a working group meeting in order to identify the priority concerns and launch the network;

- b. Supporting the network through the establishment of a website with interactive technology (electronic forum, wiki, etc), so as to facilitate the exchange of good country practices in the area of IT, strengthening national statistical offices in the region.

22. Initially the network will be formed by senior IT staff of the South Asian NSOs, but will be expanded to a wider audience upon demand. This shall create a momentum and a sustainable means for technical cooperation in the region. In order to ensure the active maintenance and sustainability of the network, the project will recommend that a network bureau with a pragmatic regulation be established, with mandate to be rotated among its members.

23. An essential requirement for such a network to function is reasonable access to internet. Since countries are at different levels in terms of technological connectivity, the project will assist those national statistical offices most in need by providing them with the necessary computer equipment and software to connect to the internet. Without a connection professionals in some national statistical offices will not be able to be an active member of the network, undermining the success of the project. The selection of the recipients will be undertaken in consultation with the participants of the working group on IT as well as the Steering Committee of the project.

24. The project will be executed by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNSD), in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). A Steering Committee formed by the chief statisticians of the South Asian national statistical offices, UNSD and UNESCAP will assist on the decisions taken throughout the project in accordance to the region's needs. The meetings of the Steering Committee will be combined with other events or will be organized via long-distance conferencing in order to optimize the project resource.

25. The overall strategy of the project also focuses on using and strengthening local expertise and making it available to all countries of the region through the network established. Thus, the project will reinforce existing south/south networks and create opportunities for experts to learn from their peers in order to diminish isolation of NSOs.

### **3.4 Activities**

26. The project will have two main components, namely statistical capacity building and knowledge management. The expected accomplishments will be achieved through implementation of the activities comprising of training workshops, an expert group meeting, study tours and by direct technical assistance through advisory services by experts in the relevant areas from UNSD and UNESCAP, and by general temporary assistant staff and consultants. The activities were designed, at this stage, based on desk research, lessons learnt from previous similar projects and UNSD's regular dialogue with national statisticians in the region.

#### ***3.4.1. Statistical capacity building***

##### ***a. Seminars and Workshops***

27. Four training workshops are proposed for staff of national statistical offices to improve the technical capability of countries in data collection methods and strategies, compilation, dissemination and analysis of statistical data, with special emphasis on specific areas of need in the region, and on organization of the statistical systems and user-producer relations. The workshops will be focused on: (1) Statistical organization and user-producer relations; (2) Harmonization of development indicators with special focus on the indicators used in major conference follow-up and MDGs; (3) Methods for collection of socio-economic data using population censuses, households and labour force surveys; (4) Good practices in promotion of an integrated approach to compilation of economic statistics, including implementation of 1993 SNA, Rev.1.

***b. Study tours (fellowships)***

28. Intra-regional study tours to draw on the strengths and achievements of countries in the region will be organized. This will allow staff from statistically less developed countries to learn from other countries' experiences and see examples of good practices in selected statistical fields. This particular form of co-operation will increase the impact of the program through transferring the knowledge and development of skills. Study tours are also intended to give exposure to statisticians from developing countries at international statistical fora to enable them derive knowledge and professional competence from their training, which will enable them to participate more actively in the statistical development of their countries.

***c. Advisory services***

29. Technical assistance in the form of advisory services will be provided by the UNSD experts, and, if required, by consultants upon the approval by the Steering Committee of the project. Preference will be given to sub-regional experts when available. This activity aims at strengthening national and regional institutions capacities in the collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics and the use and maintenance of technology.

***3.4.2. Knowledge management***

30. Establishing a network of experts in statistics-related Information Technology (IT) to promote knowledge management in the region in the form of common platforms for data and metadata exchange and the sharing of information on methodologies and statistical analysis. The capacity of national statistics offices in this region needs to be strengthened not only in the substantive statistical areas but also in the field of information technology. This activity will be composed of two parts:

***a. Meetings***

31. A working group meeting with NSO IT technical national experts at the CIO level to discuss and decide on the modalities of common platforms.

***b. A web-based knowledge management tool***

32. Establishment of a website with interactive technology, so as to facilitate the sharing and exchange of good country practices in the area of demographic, social and economic statistics and IT.

**4. Project monitoring and evaluation**

33. The project will adopt the following complementary measures for monitoring progress:

#### **4.1. Monitoring**

34. While UNSD will be the lead agency in managing the project implementation, a Steering Committee formed by chief statisticians of the national statistical offices will be set up to lead and monitor the implementation of project activities. The Steering Committee will meet face-to-face occasionally, preferably at the occasion of other project events, such as workshops. In order to optimize the project resources the primary way of communication will be through e-mails and long-distance teleconferencing for periodic project review and assessment of the project progress.

35. UNSD, as the lead executing agency, will maintain regular follow-up contact with the members of the Steering Committee to monitor the preparation and execution of project activities according to the establish project timeline. The Steering Committee should take immediate action in case of any emerging issues and/or project adjustments that need to be addressed.

#### **4.2. Evaluation**

36. The expected accomplishments of the project will be evaluated using the indicators set out in the logical framework as described in Annex 1. According to the type of project activity, specific information will be collected for project evaluation. The following will be some of the indicators that will serve to monitor and evaluate the project progress:

- (a) Increased knowledge of workshops' participants on statistical organization, MDGs, data collection methods and strategies for compilation of socio-economic statistics as evidenced by their evaluation questionnaires;
- (b) Increased volume of official statistical data for tracking progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and internationally agreed development goals used by statistical systems, the public and the media;
- (c) Increased number of national statistical offices using common statistical definitions and methodologies;
- (d) Increased number of national statistical offices providing indicators of improved quality for policy-oriented research and analysis;
- (e) Positive evaluation about the usefulness and extent of outreach of the knowledge management tool.

37. UNSD will prepare self-evaluation reports based on work-in-progress reports. An overall substantive project evaluation by an independent professional evaluator is set to take place at the end of the project period.

## **5. External factors and risks**

38. In implementing the project it is assumed that targeted beneficiaries have sustained interest in strengthening their statistical capacity, and that the national statistical offices are provided with adequate resources to pursue the desired statistical activities.

39. The success of the project is contingent on the full commitments of the participating countries. Commitments will be ensured through the Steering Committee, however, other external factors could delay or disrupt the implementation of the project. Some of the external factors, which could be anticipated at this stage are:

- i. the activities on national statistical coordination are contingent on the cooperation of several statistics producing line ministries and institutions;
- ii. the success of the project is contingent to the appropriate nomination of the national statistical staff to be trained;
- iii. the success of the project is contingent to the proper assimilation of the techniques by the trainees and their increasingly significant use in activities of their regular work programme;
- iv. turnover of trained national staff could pose serious challenge to NSOs and the project activities, hence retention of well-trained staff who will provide sustainable technical capacity is one of the major challenges facing NSOs;
- v. political resistance may hamper improvement of organization of the statistical systems and user producers relations;
- vi. competing technical cooperation activities may lead to possible duplication and extra burden on NSOs;
- vii. development of common methodologies and classifications for the collection of socio-economic data common statistical priorities could generate resistance of countries for the following reasons: (a) it might require additional training and have financial implications; and (b) it could lead to non-comparability of statistical series.
- viii. the lack of permanent internet connection and easy access to it in some NSOs may put at risk their active participation in IT network, and thus may undermine the success of this project activity;
- ix. financial constraints could limit or delay improvement in IT infrastructure;
- x. security situation could disrupt the project implementation.

## **6. Implementation Arrangements**

40. The project will be executed by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). Cooperation with country offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will be needed for the organization of specific programme activities. Depending on the chosen substantive issues cooperation with other specialized agencies could be necessary as well.

41. A Steering Committee will be set up to lead and monitor the project implementation. The Committee would be expected to develop a framework to institutionalize the activities of the project and ensure its continuity after the project phases out at the end of 2010. The proposed project has been formulated to also take advantages of synergies with ongoing technical cooperation activities in the region. UNSD has initiated dialogue with other organisations to complement each other's efforts in the region. It

will also use existing channels to inform others, such as PARIS21, on project activities and implementation progress.

## Annex 1: Logical Framework

<i>Intervention logic</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Source of verification</i>	<i>Risks/ Assumptions</i>
<p><b>Objective:</b></p> <p>To strengthen the capacity of countries and relevant regional institutions in South Asia for the production and analysis, on a regular basis, of benchmark statistics required for national development planning and for monitoring progress towards the internationally agreed development goals</p>			
<p><b>EA1</b></p> <p>Improved organization of the statistical systems and user-producers relations, resulting in quality, timely and relevant data on indicators of internationally agreed development goals</p>	<p>Increased volume of official socio-economic statistics for tracking progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and internationally agreed development goals used by statistical systems, the public and the media</p> <p>Increased knowledge of workshops' participants on statistical organization, MDGs, data collection methods and strategies for compilation of socio-economic statistics</p>	<p>National and international MDGs progress reports and international database</p> <p>National Human Development Reports</p> <p>Other statistical and analytical reports</p> <p>Workshops training materials and reports</p> <p>Workshops evaluation questionnaires</p>	<p>Political resistance</p> <p>Sufficient cooperation between statistics producing line ministries and institutions</p> <p>Competing technical cooperation activities leading to possible duplication and extra burden on NSO, and competing priorities may not allow key staff of NSOs to attend workshops and study tour programmes</p> <p>Appropriate nomination of the staff to be trained</p> <p>Staff turnover</p> <p>Financial constraints could limit or delay improvement/update IT infrastructure, and communications breakdown in some of the member countries could hinder regional integration and information exchange</p>



<p><i>1. Main activities</i></p> <p>1.1 Workshop on statistical organization and user-producer relations</p> <p>1.2 Workshop on harmonization of development indicators with special focus on the indicators used in major conference follow up and MDGs</p> <p>1.3 Working group meeting of NSOs IT experts</p> <p>1.4 Study tours</p>			
<p><b>EA2</b></p> <p>Increased adoption of international statistical methods and standards for knowledge management in relation to the measurement of progress towards the internationally agreed development goals</p>	<p>Increased number of national statistical offices using common statistical definitions and methodologies</p> <p>Increased number of national statistical offices providing indicators of improved quality for policy-oriented research and analysis</p> <p>Positive evaluation about the usefulness and extent of outreach of the knowledge management tool</p>	<p>MDGs progress reports</p> <p>International Human Development Report</p> <p>Other statistical and analytical reports</p> <p>Workshops evaluation questionnaires</p> <p>Website access logs for evaluating the knowledge management tool</p>	<p>Resistance by countries to adopt new standards for the following reasons:</p> <p>(a) it might require new training and have financial implications</p> <p>(b) it could lead to non-comparability of statistical series</p> <p>The lack of permanent internet connection and easy access to it in some NSOs may put at risk their active participation in IT network, and thus may undermine the success of this project activity</p> <p>See also risks for EA1</p>

## *2. Main activities*

- 2.1 Workshop on methods for collection of socio-economic data using population censuses, household and labour force survey
- 2.2 Workshop on good practices in promotion of an integrated approach to compilation of economic statistics, including implementation of 1993 SNA, Rev.1.
- 2.3 Study Tours
- 2.4 Web-based knowledge management tool

## Annex 2: Result based work plan

Expected accomplishment (EA)	Main activity	Timeframe by output/activity		
		2008	2009	2010
<b>EA 1: Improved organization of the statistical systems and user-producers relations, resulting in quality, timely and relevant data on indicators of internationally agreed development goals</b>	A1.1 Workshop on statistical organization and user-producer relations	x		
	A1.2 Workshop on harmonization of development indicators with special focus on the indicators used in major conference follow up and MDGs		x	
	A1.3 Working group meeting of NSOs IT experts	x		
	A1.4 Study tours	x	x	x
<b>EA 2: Adoption of international statistical methods and standards for knowledge management in relation to the Millennium Development Goals and internationally agreed development goals</b>	A2.1 Workshop on methods for collection of socio-economic data using population censuses, household and labour force surveys		x	
	A2.2 Workshop on good practices in promotion of an integrated approach to compilation of economic statistics, including implementation of 1993 SNA, Rev.1.		x	
	A2.3 Study tours	x	x	x
	A2.4 Web-based knowledge management tool	x	x	x