Coordination of capacity building activities

Report of Task Team 2: Regional Statistical Training Centers

CCSA – Task Team 2 – Technical cooperation

Background

Task Team 2 is one of four task teams created during the 8th session of CCSA (Montreal, 2006), in an effort to assist CCSA to improve agency coordination in the area of technical cooperation. The specific focus of this task team is on regional training centers. After its formation, the following Terms of Reference were discussed and agreed among the members of Task Team 2 (UNSD, Paris21, FAO, ILO):

- Compile an inventory of existing regional training centers, programs and activities.
- Review functions and effectiveness of existing regional statistical training activities.
- Formulate recommendations to CCSA on ways to improve delivery of regional training in official statistics;

These Terms of Reference were presented to the Tenth Session of the CCSA (Madrid, September 2007), and the Committee agreed in its report that “this task team would focus only on training centers with a regional reach. This would include regional training centers as well as national centers that provide training to official statisticians outside the country.” In a progress note to CCSA (SA/2008/4), the task team presented in February 2008 a preliminary listing of regional and sub-regional training institutions as well as a proposal on the topics to be considered in collecting information on the training institutions and invited CCSA member to provide comments on both. As no further specific comments were received, the task team proceeded to compile the inventory on the basis of the proposals contained in SA/2008/4. This was done in two steps: (i) in a desk study, UNSD compiled information that was publicly available (from websites, brochures etc), and defined a simple standard way of presenting the respective information in a tabular format. (ii) all regional training centers were invited to validate and complete this information. By the end of August 12 of 16 had done so. The inventory is presented in annex 1.

Inventory of Regional Statistical Training Centers
The inventory identifies the perhaps surprisingly low number of 16 regional statistical training centers. It builds initially on a listing of training institutions (and their contact information) prepared by the Paris21 Task Team on training and published on the Paris21 website. This listing currently contains 48 entries.

The smaller number contained in this inventory, for which more detailed information was compiled, is explained by the application of two criteria, i.e. regional training in official statistics, i.e. those training institution were excluded, which had clearly a limited national focus in terms of target audience as well as those that had a more academic orientation towards general training in statistics. The intention was to identify those training facilities that target a group of countries, a sub-region or a region and offer professional training in the field of official statistics.

It should be noted that a number of global and regional organizations offer ad hoc training courses/workshops at the regional/sub-regional level. However, due to the ad-hoc nature of this supply of training, it is difficult to capture it in this kind of inventory. Furthermore, as it was understood that the purpose of this exercise was to establish a kind of baseline of what is currently available in terms of regional statistical training, a screening criterium of “institutional permancy” was applied, i.e. there had to be a clearly identifiable location for the training and some element of continuity of the training programme.

The inventory compiled includes the following categories for more detailed information:
- Type of training (degree, diploma, short course)
- Duration
- Level of trainees (professionals, service staff, users, all)
- Regional coverage
- Subject matter coverage
- Source of sponsorship/ownership (international organization, regional organization, country)
- website
- Contact information

After discussion and review at the CCSA meeting and after completion of the remaining validation process it is suggested to load the inventory for reference on the publicly accessible part of the CCSA website.

**Functions and effectiveness of regional training**

An analytical look at the inventory yields the following observations:
- First it is telling that after the application of three simple criteria (permanent infrastructure, regional orientation, professional training in official statistics) the number of currently existing regional training centers in official statistics, as contained in this inventory, is very small. This raises the question, whether this
supply is sufficient to adequately cover the training needs of national statistical systems?

• With respect to regional coverage, it is noticeable that there do not seem to exist regional statistical training centers (as defined for the purpose of this study) in Latin America. In fact, the Statistical Conference of the Americas has instituted a working group on “Training and human resources management policies”; Asia is generally covered through UNSIAP, but, despite the heterogeneity of the continent, there does not seem to exist a supporting sub-regional structure; Africa is the most covered region, in terms of regional statistical training centers, an institutional investment, which might be due to the existing considerable demand. Again, the question may be raised, whether those institutions quantitatively and qualitatively are able to cover the need of the region?

• Regarding subject matter coverage, the training focus is currently more on basic statistical methods, including survey methodology, as well as those ‘established’ statistical areas, where global statistical standards have been agreed upon (national accounts, census). Generally, economic statistics is dominant and only few institutions offer elements of newer statistical areas (e.g. environment statistics), or more specialized statistical areas. To the extent that some institutions also target higher level participants, some courses cover ‘infrastructural themes of statistics’ (legislation, organization/management).

• Not sufficient information was provided by the regional statistical training centers to permit an assessment of effectiveness and impact of the respective regional programmes. The few organizations who provided some information measure performance through so called “input” indicators (budgets, number of persons trained etc.) rather than through “output” measures (new statistical infrastructure, new series compiled, improvements of statistical quality).

**National Training Centers**

Although not strictly within the scope of this particular study, it is noteworthy that the UN Statistics Division conducted an ad-hoc enquiry with national statistical offices around the world, where the following three simple questions were posed:

• Does your organization offer a formal training programme on official statistics? If yes, what kind of courses do you offer? (subject matter, length, level of target audience)?

• To your knowledge are there other national institutions (universities, government training centers), that offer training in official statistics?

• Are your training programmes open to nationals from other countries? If yes, how are the trainees selected?

So far a positively surprising 96 replies were received, which in itself can be considered indicative of the considerable interest that national statistical office have in the topic of statistical training. Slightly more than half of the respondents (namely 51) indicate that they conduct some kind of formal statistical training within the national statistical office. The topics taught, range from basic statistical tools to extensive
curricula, covering practically the whole spectrum of official statistics. Almost one quarter (namely 22) of the respondents indicate that their training programmes are open to nationals of other countries. Further investigation with these respondents, will need to establish under what modalities such international participation is currently possible, and whether it extends beyond a particular geographic or linguistic region.

Whilst the respondents who answered the question about international participation in the affirmative, were primarily from the developed countries, it is encouraging to find that opening existing national training centers to other countries is, if not already a practice, so at least a distinct possibility. This would seem to indicate a possible cost-effective and sustainable strategy to increase the supply of formal training in official statistics at the sub-regional level, by using the infrastructure and the practical experience of national statistical institutions as a starting point for sub-regional training programmes. Taking into account geographic and linguistic considerations, there exists an opportunity for the international community to play a supporting role (strategic investments, provision of resource persons, development and exchange of training materials) in developing a network of national/sub-regional centers.

**Recommendations on improved delivery of regional training**

From the analysis of the materials collected from the regional and national training centers a number of conclusions may be drawn:

- First, the usefulness and effectiveness, in principle, of regional/subregional training delivery needs to be emphasized, in particular when the training includes opportunities for meaningful ‘south-south’ sharing of practical experiences among groups of countries who share similar linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds.
- One possibility to effectively extend the range and the coverage of this type of training, is to build a network of key countries, who would be willing and able to function, de facto, as sub-regional training centers.
- One observation relates to the fact that only 4 of the 16 regional training centers in the list are related to a CCSA agency. As they refer to different regions and subject matter areas, no coordination issues arise.
- It would be useful to review and improve the regional coverage. This would be a task for which the UN Regional Commissions would be well suited.
- The subject matter coverage of the existing training supply needs to be broadened, based on a thorough needs assessment, which in turn could be based on an analysis of national statistical development plans. In order to cover new and specialized areas, collaborative arrangements between existing centers and respective specialized agencies may need to be made or extended, as the case may be.
- Regional training institutions could play a stronger role in bringing together data users and data producers in order to fill in the gap that may exist between data needs for policy making and existing data, and in order to address the
challenge, that existing data are under-used because of lack of information, problems with access or weak capacity to analyse data.

- Communications from the existing training centers, show little or no evidence of cooperation between the various existing training centers. There seems to be a potential for synergies, through the exchange of experience and/or the sharing of staff and/or training materials.

- As regional training centers are, by nature, potentially distant from the target participants, they would particularly benefit from the development of new forms of training tools (e.g. e-training).