Report of the Inter-agency Meeting on Coordination of Statistical Activities

(New York, 17-19 September 2002)

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I. Introduction

1. The Inter-agency Meeting on Coordination of Statistical Activities was held in New York from 17 to 19 September 2002. The Agenda is contained in Annex I below, the list of participants in Annex II and the list of documents in Annex III.

II. Work of the Inter-agency Meeting on Coordination of Statistical Activities

A. Opening of the Meeting

2. In opening the Meeting Mr. Hermann Habermann, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) explained that UNSD had called the Meeting because the Statistical Commission had "stressed the need for international organizations to strengthen the coordination of their statistical activities:" and "requested the international organizations to develop a new system for effective coordination given that the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities had been disbanded as at 31 December 2001". Furthermore, he noted, that consultations among chief statisticians from the UN agencies and international organizations had shown, that there was broad support for holding such a Meeting. He informed representatives of international agencies, that the report of this Meeting will be presented to the Statistical Commission. Moreover, matters that will require attention of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) or policy guidance will be presented to the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) of CEB.

B. Election of Chairman

3. The Meeting elected Mr. Andrew Flatt of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) as Chairman.

C. Adoption of the agenda

4. The Meeting adopted the agenda as set out in annex I.

D. Treatment of any “unfinished business” of the former ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities

5. The Meeting decided that the following two subjects were important and should be included in any future work plan that might be developed by the Meeting:

   (a) Good practices in citation in the outputs of international statistical offices (UNESCO); and

   (b) Collection of disaggregated statistics by international organizations (including the uses of disaggregated statistics and the reporting burdens on countries) (UNICEF).
E. Improving the quality of data used for indicators for the Millennium Development Goals and Targets

6. The Meeting welcomed the oral report by the Special Advisor to the Secretary General on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) global reporting process. Some agencies expressed concern regarding the selection and relevance of the indicators for some targets, especially in areas where data quality and availability are a serious problem; in particular some agencies voiced concern that real change in the indicators will be confounded with changes resulting from revisions and improvements of the data. This problem will be particularly acute when examining annual differences. The Meeting stressed again the importance of national capacity building in order for countries to be able to produce the necessary data for national monitoring of MDGs and to provide data to the international community for global monitoring.

7. Various participants in the Meeting stated that the coordinated process led by UNSD for the completion of the 2002 MDG report had been successful and that its momentum should be maintained. The Meeting supported the idea of having further inter-agency expert group meetings to ensure full participation and effective coordination among partner agencies.

8. The Meeting took note of UNSD’s concern about the need for the global reporting to be based on common regional groupings. Agencies designated to provide data on MDG indicators re-confirmed their willingness to provide regional figures on the basis of the Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistics Use\(^2\) to the extent possible. Agencies also agreed on the importance of comprehensive authoritative metadata in the presentation of indicators.

F. Issues relating to the assessment of the quality of statistical data in developing countries

9. The Meeting took note of the report prepared by FAO on quality of statistical data in developing countries and shared experiences regarding the agency’s efforts to improve the reporting and the quality of data received from developing countries. The following issues were highlighted:

(a) The need to develop close partnerships between international agencies and reporting national offices.

(b) The need to continue efforts to request and standardize metadata information

(c) The need to improve coordination among national agencies involved in data reporting using mechanisms such as the GDDS

(d) The need to strengthen statistical capacity to produce better data for users at the national and international level.

(e) The need to improve the transfer of technology to facilitate the flow of data at lower costs for both countries and international organizations
The Meeting took note of the use of incentives by international organizations for the collection of national data, however, it expressed concern at the demands by some countries for payment for data provision.

G. **Quality assurance for statistics in international statistical services**

10. The Meeting welcomed the comprehensive analysis of this topic contained in the paper presented by OECD. Several international agencies shared their experiences with quality assurance procedures, indicating that most discrepancies between national and international figures as well as between international sources are explainable as they are often the result of different compilation and estimation methods. However, the Meeting agreed that more transparency about all methods applied is needed and agencies committed themselves to review in particular their web pages accordingly, making their own corporate quality assessment procedures more transparent. In this context, it was also noted that international organizations make frequent use of, and should in fact themselves adhere to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. While the exchange on quality assurances was considered useful, it was recognized that there are limits to harmonizing them across agencies, though the Meeting welcomed joint activity in this area between the IMF and EUROSTAT and encouraged other agencies to adopt consistent terminology/concepts to the extent possible.

H. **Reducing duplication of data collection from countries**

11. The Meeting took note of the oral update given by the Deputy Director of the United Nations Statistics Division on the steps undertaken to address the specific concerns raised by some member states on duplication of data collection. All agencies involved, in particular those designated lead agencies for a particular problem area assured UNSD of their full cooperation for the preparation of a comprehensive report on this issue for the 34th Session of Statistical Commission in 2003.

I. **Coordination of data sets disseminated by different organizations covering the same subject matter**

12. International agencies shared their experiences with joint data collection and common data sets. It was recognized that the examples mentioned in document SA/2002/8 were indeed examples of problem areas. Access to water and sanitation, exchange rates, and child mortality data were cited as further examples, where problems of discrepancies existed. There was agreement that these discrepancies in disseminated data series are best addressed and solved on a bilateral/trilateral basis with the directly concerned parties involved. Therefore, while not concurring with the specific suggestions for action made in para 4 of document SA/2002/8, the Meeting agreed that this was an important item that needed to stay on its agenda.

J. **Coordination in the field of health statistics**

13. The Meeting welcomed the oral presentation made by WHO on its on-going initiatives that include: the consultations with countries to improve validity and reliability of measures, the strengthening of data reporting providing countries with new tools for measurement, the
launching of the World Health Survey (WHS), and the strengthening of vital registration systems.

14. The Meeting expressed concern about the overlap of the WHS programme with other ongoing survey initiatives at international and national level. It also raised questions about the sustainability of the WHS programme at country level. The Meeting recognized the existing problem of coordination at country level where WHO works with its mandated counterpart, the Ministry of Health with little involvement of the national statistical office and welcomed the intention of WHO to improve in-country coordination.

15. The Meeting also emphasized the need to improve the exchange of information on health statistics at the international level and welcomed WHO’s intention to intensify the cooperation between agencies in this area. In particular WHO agreed to designate a focal point on statistical matters and to attending the meeting of the EUROSTAT Taskforce on Health Interview Surveys on 2-3 October 2002.

K. Information items:

(a) Major new initiatives planned by organizations

16. The Meeting took note of new initiatives planned by IMF, FAO, UNCTAD and UNHSP as highlighted in the documents SA/2002/10, Adds. 1,2 and 3 respectively. It also took note of oral presentations under this item, in particular:

(a) OECD’s description of the Glossary of Statistical Terms currently being developed;

(b) UNESCO’s initiatives in the field of science, culture, telecommunications, and education statistics with a focus on improving data on early childhood and informal education;

(c) The development of a methodological framework for “decent work” by ILO;

(b) Issues related to the work of the task forces and inter-secretariat working groups

17. The Meeting took note of the written reports presented by the task forces on finance statistics and on international trade statistics as well as by the inter-secretariat working group on price statistics. In particular the Meeting was informed that the task force on finance statistics is putting forward proposals for further methodological work. The Meeting also took note of the oral reports presented by the task force on International trade in services and the inter-secretariat working group on national accounts (ISWGNA), in particular the ISWGNA’s intention to review the current procedures for updating the 1993 System of National Accounts.

(c) Programme review of services statistics for the Statistical Commission 2003

18. The Meeting welcomed the progress report on the review of service statistics, which was prepared by OECD with inputs from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It shared the concern of the authors about the under-representation of developing countries in the Voorburg group. It considered proposals such as increased sponsoring of developing countries representatives in
Voorburg group meetings, holding of such meetings in developing countries, inviting comments on draft recommendations and guidelines to be located on the website and involving existing regional statistical committees. These proposals were of course considered useful to strengthen participation of developing countries in any citygroup.

(d) Coordination of development indicators in the context of follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits

19. The Meeting took note of UNSD’s activities to follow-up on the recommendations of the Statistical Commission on development indicators, in particular the formation of a standing advisory committee of national experts.

(e) Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission

20. The Meeting noted that, under other items of its agenda, the necessary collaboration on preparations for the thirty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission had been covered, namely, work on national accounts, international merchandise trade statistics, statistics of international trade in services, services (programme review), finance statistics, price statistics, coordination of development indicators, and duplication in requests to countries for statistics. The Meeting received an update on the work on the International Comparison Programme, and on plans for an Expert Group meeting on the scope of social statistics and the expected reporting on these subjects to the Statistical Commission.

21. In respect of follow-up to the thirty-third session of the Statistical Commission, the Meeting noted that any necessary collaboration had been carried out and had been covered under this and other agenda items of the Meeting.

22. The Meeting agreed to propose the inclusion in 2004 in the multi-year programme of work of the Statistical Commission, the item “Guidelines on presentation of statistical data, especially on the Internet” and accepted an offer by OECD to do the preparations for this item including (a) an oral statement on the issue at the Statistical Commission session in 2003, (b) obtaining input from countries during 2003, (c) a draft document to the Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities in 2003 and (d) a document for the Statistical Commission in 2004.

(f) Singapore Consultative Seminar on Governance

23. The Meeting was briefed by the IMF on the major conclusions of the Singapore Consultative Seminar on Governance (28-30 May 2002) and agreed to consider at a future meeting the issue of how international agencies can support countries in their efforts to establish effective statistical governance systems.

(g) Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) Initiative

24. The Meeting took note of the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange Initiative sponsored by six organizations to maintain and if necessary develop new e-standards for their
data exchange. It welcomed the IMF’s invitation for interested agencies to participate in this dialogue. It agreed on the necessity to consider this item further at its future meetings.

L. How to organize the future coordination of statistical activities

25. The Meeting noted that the High Level Committee on Programmes and the Statistical Commission had recognized the need for continuing coordination of statistical activities following the discontinuation of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities as of 31 December 2001. The Meeting endorsed the conclusions of the consultative meeting that was held on 7 March 2002 among the international organizations that were present at the Statistical Commission. Those conclusions were:

(i) there was a strong continuing need for coordination of international statistical work;

(ii) the coordination work would involve meetings, but driven more by needs rather than according to a fixed schedule;

(iii) a better job could be done on coordination especially with focussing on emerging issues requiring coordination and follow-up of decisions to ensure action is taken;

26. The Meeting decided to establish a Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA), with a terms of reference comprised of the “Notes on a proposed Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities” which were attached to document SA/2002/15, and which are set out in Annex IV to this report, with comments and changes as follows:

(a) an additional objective of the Committee should be “To foster good practices in the structuring and programming of statistical activities in the international organizations”; 

(b) the participation of the Directors of statistical services or equivalent in the Committee’s meetings was considered particularly important for the effectiveness of the Committee’s work.

(c) work done on coordination of activities between meetings and follow-up of decisions are important elements of the work of the Committee and this work should be reflected in the reports of the Committee to the Statistical Commission;

(d) the formal meetings provide an excellent opportunity for bi-lateral and multi-lateral discussions and networking, and time should be set aside in the meeting schedule for these activities;

(e) the Committee should strive for efficiency and effectiveness in its work and should adopt a strong pro-active approach to its work.
(f) in principle it is expected that there will be an annual meeting, but advantage will be taken of the Statistical Commission session each year to bring the Committee together to consider any issues that need to be considered at that time and to re-consider the proposed agenda and need for the next scheduled Committee session;

(g) all documents for the meetings should be distributed well in advance of the meetings;

(h) the Secretariat should contact the lead organizations well in advance of a meeting of the Committee to remind them of commitments made;

(i) the reports of the meetings of the Committee should specify the lead organizations which are responsible for any actions and follow-ups;

27. The Meeting requested the UNSD to prepare the terms of reference in line with para. 26 above for the Committee to review.

28. The Meeting agreed that the Committee should meet from 9 to 11 September 2003; the Meeting adopted a provisional agenda for that meeting (Annex V); the Meeting accepted an offer from the ILO to host the meeting. In line with para. 26(f), above the Meeting decided that the Committee would also meet in New York at 4:00 pm on Monday 3 March (the day prior to the start of the Statistical Commission), and requested the Secretariat to distribute the provisional agenda for the September meeting prior to 3 March to facilitate consideration of that agenda and the need for the session to be held as scheduled.

29. In line with para.6 of the “Notes on a proposed Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities” the meeting elected Mr. Andrew Flatt of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) as Chairman of the Committee for a period of two years.

Notes


3. Bank for International Settlements (BIS), European Central Bank (ECB), EUROSTAT, IMF, OECD, UNSD
Annex I

Agenda

1. Opening of the Meeting.

2. Election of Chairman.

3. Adoption of the agenda.

4. Treatment of any “unfinished business” of the former ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities.

5. Improving the quality of data used for indicators for the Millennium Development Goals and Targets
   (a) Improvement of the general process
   (b) Harmonization of regional definitions
   (c) Coordination of global surveys
   (d) Conceptual and methodological issues

6. Issues relating to the assessment of the quality of statistical data in developing countries.

7. Quality assurance for statistics in international statistical services.

8. Reducing duplication of data collection from countries.

9. Coordination of data sets disseminated by different organizations covering the same subject matter.

10. Coordination in the field of health statistics.

11. Information items:
   (a) Major new initiatives planned by organizations
   (b) Issues related to the work of the task forces and inter-secretariat working groups
   (c) Programme review of services statistics for the Statistical Commission for 2003
   (d) Coordination of development indicators in the context of follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits
   (e) Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission
   (f) Singapore Consultative Seminar on Governance
   (g) Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) Initiative

12. How to organize the future coordination of statistical activities.
13. Other business.

Annex II

List of participants

United Nations entities and programmes

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Statistics Division

Hermann Habermann
Willem F. M. De Vries
Mary Charnie
Cristina Hannig
Robert Johnston
Richard Roberts
Stefan Schweinfest (Secretary)

Population Division

Larry Heligman

Division for Sustainable Development

Anne Kerr

Executive Office of the Secretary General

Michael Doyle

Economic Commission for Europe

Lidia Bratanova

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Andrew Flatt (Chairman)

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Henri Laurencin

United Nations Development Programme

Haishan Fu
Tom Griffin

United Nations Environment Programme

Ashbindu Singh

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Guenter Karl

United Nations Children's Fund

Gareth Jones
Tessa Wardlaw

United Nations Population Fund

Iqbal Alam

Specialized agencies and related organizations

International Labour Organization

Sylvester Young

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Robert Mayo

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Denise Lievesley
Jose Pessoa
World Health Organization  
Chris Murray

World Bank  
Shaida Badiee

International Monetary Fund  
Carol Carson

United Nations Industrial Development Organization  
Tetsuo Yamada

**Other international and non-governmental organizations**

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development  
Denis Ward

Statistical Office of the European Communities  
James Whitworth

World Tourism Organization  
Antonio Massieu

World Trade Organization  
Roslyn Jackson

Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States  
Mikhail A. Korolev
## Annex III

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A/57/270 5 Millennium indicators: summary of progress at the regional level based on the Secretary-General’s report A/57/270 (annex); Note by UNSD

Unnumbered 5 Estimating Global Slum Dwellers, Note by UN-HSP

Unnumbered 11(e) United Nations Expert Group Meeting on The Scope of Social Statistics; Note by UNSD

Unnumbered 11(f) Summary of proceedings of the Consultative Seminar on Governance of National Statistical Systems, Singapore, 28-30 May 2002

Unnumbered 11(g) Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange Initiative

Unnumbered List of participants
Notes on a Proposed Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities

1. The Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities was established on (date) by the (establishing authority). Its objectives, which it takes over from the former ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities ((a), (b) and (c) below, modified by (d) below) are:

   (a) to promote coordination, integration and complementarity among the statistical programmes of the international organizations, including the avoidance of duplication and reduction in reporting burdens on member states and to promote coordination and consistency in statistical practices and development;

   (b) to provide coordinated preparations for the treatment of statistical issues in intergovernmental meetings, including the Statistical Commission and coordinated follow-up of decisions of the intergovernmental bodies, thus providing a responsive focus for addressing the needs of member states.

   (c) the coordination activity aims to achieve an integrated system in the collection, processing and dissemination of international statistics by promoting the coordination of the international statistical system including technical cooperation in statistics. It also aims to facilitate the use in member states of internationally agreed concepts, definitions, recommendations and classifications of different international organizations by coordinating the work on methodological development and promoting harmonization of the methodologies in various fields of statistics.

   (d) within the above framework the Committee focuses on emerging issues requiring coordination, and follow-up of decisions to ensure action is taken.

2. The members of the Committee comprise all members and observers of the former ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities, namely United Nations Statistics Division, the Regional Commissions, the UN Programmes and Funds, the specialized agencies and related organizations, certain non-UN intergovernmental organizations (OECD, EUROSTAT, Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, World Tourism Organization and World Trade Organization), regional development banks and the International Statistical Institute. Other organizations can participate by invitation.

3. Representation in the Committee is normally at the level of Director of an organizations statistical service or equivalent.

4. The Committee functions on a task oriented basis using lead agency arrangements.
5. The Committee meets on an ad hoc basis as required by circumstances, usually for two and half (2.5) days, but the decision to hold meetings and their length is driven by substance and needs not by schedule.

6. The Committee elects a Chairman who serves for a two year period and is eligible for re-election for a second two year term. The UNSD is the permanent Secretariat.

7. A decisions-and-actions-only report is prepared for adoption at the end of each meeting; the report is made available to the United Nations Statistical Commission and if necessary or desirable the report is referred to the High Level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations Chief Executives Board on Coordination (CEB).
Annex V

Proposed Agenda for the first meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities*

1. Opening of the Meeting

2. Adoption of the agenda (UNSD)

3. Terms of Reference of the CCSA (UNSD)

4. Draft guidelines on presentation of statistical data, especially on the Internet (OECD)

5. Good practices in citation in the outputs of international statistical offices (UNESCO)

6. Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) Initiative (IMF)

7. Improving the quality of data used for indicators for the Millennium Development Goals and Targets (UNSD)

8. Coordination of data sets disseminated by different organizations covering the same subject matter (UNSD)

9. Collection of disaggregated statistics by international organizations (UNICEF)

10. Harmonization of base years for index numbers (UNCTAD)

11. Strengthening governance of statistical systems (IMF)

12. Information items:
   (a) Major new initiatives planned by organizations (ALL)
   (b) Issues related to the work of the task forces and inter-secretariat working groups (CONVENERS)
   (c) Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission (UNSD)

13. Other business.


* The agency responsible for preparing background documentation is indicated in brackets.