The dilemma of International organizations in using non-official statistics
The role of international statistics

- Statistical programmes in international organizations: an “accounting” function or the generation of knowledge?

- Presenting statistics or using statistics to explain regional or global phenomena?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Accounting” Framework</th>
<th>Presenting statistics</th>
<th>Generating knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re-publication of data provided by Member States (no change)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustments applied to national data to ensure comparability</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production of national estimates (the organization becomes the primary source of national data)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production of forecasts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production of global/regional estimates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**International Organizations with statistics as core business**

**International Organizations with thematic focus**
When the drive is to only present statistics at global level

- Quality standards are set by the statistical communities (national and international)
- Official statistics is typically understood as the statistics produced by national statistical systems

Non official sources are not explored unless approved by NSS
When the drive is to provide knowledge.....

- Statistics is a tool not an end by itself
- To play a significant role it needs to be comprehensive
- National officials are not from NSS and do not have the same sensitivity to quality standards

What does *official statistics* mean?
Transnational nature of statistics: Example Khat flows 2008-2012
Statistics typically produced outside NSS: Annual prevalence of cannabis use among adult population (2011 World Drug Report)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>N. countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Official” data provided by countries</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNODC estimates or use of “non-official” sources</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No data</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use of modelling, any non-official source with solid pre-defined methodology
Does the “Official” label matter when defining quality in international statistics?

• Quality standards are defined according to HOW statistics are produced and not by WHOM.
• Why does the international community discuss the dichotomy of official and non-official sources? Shouldn’t it focus on Quality?
• Usually statistics produced by NSS = Good quality, but not always…
• In international organizations where the core business is statistics, Member States and IO have the same criteria to define quality and have a common vision on the need to strive to the highest data quality
• In IOs where the core business is not statistics MS representatives do not have the same statistical sensitivity and statistical quality sometimes come after national interest

• In international contexts, the more statistics become visible the more countries want to control them
What to do when data quality and national interest diverge?

Can our role as statisticians and international civil servants be made compatible?
But we need help......
• National and international statisticians to move the international debate from the use of official statistics to the use of good quality statistics.

• National statisticians to support the professional independence of international statisticians (the same that they claim for them selves).

• UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) to focus more on developing standards for statistical areas which are more at risk of political interference (outside of UNSD mandate).

• UNSC to promote the notion of quality standards in other inter-governamental fora (outside of the “comfort zone”).
Together the international statistical programmes can be stronger

- Define a UN data quality framework to be approved by the UNSC
- Peer reviews
- Ask highest managers to sign the Principles for International Statistics
- Promote the Principles outside of the statistical community
Each single international statistical programme

- To define and promote standard methodology to assess data provided by MS
- Ask countries to review data before publishing
- Gain statistical authority
Thank you!