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Capacity Building for Social Statistics:
The Role of Professional Training *

by

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** TES Institute, Luxembourg. The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

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Professional Training for Social Statistics

1 Scope of the Paper

After a background sketch of the TES Institute and the role it has been playing in professional training for statisticians in the European Union (EU), the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and other countries in Europe and its periphery, the paper focuses on training in the area of social statistics and supporting fields.

The paper examines the courses developed for the EU and the EFTA in the area of social statistics as well as courses covering areas that are essential to statistics information collection. The paper continues with a brief review of priorities for training for social statistics.

Next, the paper looks at the possible contribution of the TES Institute to global statistical capacity building to effectively support social statistics programmes.

Finally, the issue of partnership for training of statisticians is addressed.

2 Background

2.1 SHORT HISTORY OF THE TES INSTITUTE

In order to better understand the present context we present here a short history of the TES Institute, an overview of the process leading to its creation and a brief account of the recent developments.

After consultation with the Member States of the – then – European Community, Eurostat started in 1990 the project “Training of European Statisticians” (TES). During the first years of operation the TES Project was entirely focussed on the execution of an annual professional training programme for statisticians from the European Union and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and to a limited extent from the Central European countries. On top of the annual programme (to be referred to below as the CORE programme) the team running the TES Project got more and more involved in the organisation of additional courses for Central European countries and later also the Mediterranean Basin countries and other countries. These courses generate important economies of scale and help to capitalise on the initial development costs.

Six years after Eurostat created the project “Training of European Statisticians”, Statistical Offices of the Member States of the European Union and EFTA decided to formalise their commitment to this project by creating the TES Institute. The TES Institute is a non-profit association of National Statistical Institutes.

In May 2002 the Member States decided to further formalise their long-term commitment to the international training and to strengthen the legal structure of their common international training and broaden the geographical scope of the training. For that purpose a non-profit foundation was created, called “European Training and Research Institute for

Official Statistics” (ETRIOS). This new foundation will gradually take over the activities from the TES Institute. It is expected that by 2004 all current and future activities inside and outside Europe will have been transferred to the ETRIOS foundation.

2.2 THE MISSION OF THE TES INSTITUTE

The broad goals of the TES Institute are:

1. To provide statisticians in the civil service and other interested parties with training courses related to official statistics in the European Community in the context of the European Statistical System;
2. The collection and development of knowledge regarding official statistics in the European Community or in relation to it.

The organisation of training actions is one of the main activities foreseen to achieve these goals.

The execution of the annual training programme in the context of Eurostat’s project “Training of European Statisticians” has been the centrepiece of these training activities, but certainly not the only one. The organisation and the execution of the Special Courses Programme for the countries of Central Europe, the Mediterranean Basin and other regions constitutes the second main task of the TES Institute and in the third place the Institute provides consultancy on the set-up and organisation of regional training centres in a number of CIS countries. This last activity comprises training of trainers and the assistance in curriculum development.

Thus, the mission of the TES has been training and consultancy on training for statisticians, both on a subsidy basis and on contract basis. The commissioning agents defined their broad objectives and general guidelines about the desired output and the responsibility of the TES Institute has been to translate these orientations into concrete and high quality course programmes or individual courses which correspond to the demands of the commissioning agents.

The courses offered by the TES Institute may be for an international audience (international courses) or for a national audience (in-country courses). Apart from the traditional face-to-face courses the TES Institute is developing online courses in various fields. The TES Institute will also continue developing Learning Aids (manuals both on paper and online, course material, CD-ROMs, virtual libraries, etc.). Finally, the TES Institute will give a broader interpretation to its mission and become an institution that not only provides training courses but also facilitates learning in a wide sense.

It may do so by offering facilities and conditions to receive a limited number of scholars on short sabbatical leaves from their institutes or universities, thus enabling them to pursue in an international context a study on a specific subject, to work together with a colleague on the finalisation of a paper, etc.

In all its services the TES Institute will be complementary to the services offered by its members at national level. The complementarity will mainly concern typical aspects of the European Statistical System, the offering of international contacts and exchange and the international dissemination of best practices across Europe and other regions.

The international and in-country courses cover the following areas:

- Data Collection and Survey Methodology
- Official Economic Statistics
- Official Social Statistics
- Publication and Dissemination of Statistics
- Statistics and their Use in Society
- Management in a Statistical Institute
- Applied Statistical Analysis
- Statistical Information Systems

The interested reader may obtain detailed information about the individual courses in each of the above fields through the website of the TES Institute: www.tes.lu.

2.3 TES INSTITUTE AND EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP

The main partners of the TES Institute are the National Statistical Institutes, Eurostat and Universities. The character of this partnership and the symbiosis between the partners is worthwhile to look at. The National Statistical Institutes (and other government agencies employing official statisticians) are both requesting training for their employees and are reservoirs of expertise from which trainers can be recruited.

The applied character of the professional training provided through the TES Institute requires in the first place practitioners from the work floor but a sound theoretical underpinning is also an indispensable element. This is why Universities are part of the network.

2.4 TRAINING PHILOSOPHY OF THE TES INSTITUTE

As mentioned above, the essential ingredient of the training in the TES Institute is the applied character of the courses, the objective of the training being that it offers immediate support for the participant in the execution of his/her daily tasks.

The courses make use of the fact that the participants are adult persons with a professional background in applied official statistics. The participants attending the TES courses are asked well before the start of the course about their educational background, their work area, the problems they encounter in their work and the expectations they have in relation to the course. Moreover, for many courses participants are asked to provide case studies or statistical data related to their daily work. This material is studied by the course staff and discussed during the course.

Apart from the necessary theoretical background TES courses are about exchange of experience on how to apply theoretical concepts to solve day-to-day practical problems in the area of official statistics. It has been this formula which, together with a severe quality management, is considered as the key to the success of the TES Institute.

3 Past and Current Training Relevant for Social Statistics

3.1 THE CORE PROGRAMME

3.1.1 Social Statistics Courses

The CORE programme of the TES Institute is the annual training programme designed to meet the needs of the National Statistical Institutes of the EU and EFTA countries. However, the programme is open to professional statisticians from all venues. The development of courses addressing social statistics issues started in the mid-nineties and concentrated in its early stages on monetary and employment as well as population statistics. In a later stage education statistics and health statistics courses were developed.

At present the portfolio of the TES Institute comprises the following courses on social statistics¹:

Code	Course Title
SOC-001	Systems of Social Statistics
SOC-101	Analysis of European Labour Market Information
SOC-102	Labour Cost Statistics
SOC-103	Living Conditions, Social Indicators & Social Reporting
SOC-104	Concepts and Measurement of Inequality and Poverty
SOC-105	Theory and Application of Household Panel Surveys
SOC-106	Introduction to Demographic Data and Their Analysis
SOC-107	The European Labour Force Survey
SOC-108	Systems of Health Statistics
SOC-109	Systems of Education Statistics
SOC-201	Health Statistics Based on Interview Surveys
SOC-202	Statistics on Health Accounts
SOC-203	Statistics on Death Causes
SOC-221	Summer School on Social Statistics

The above list demonstrates that a great deal of attention has been given to training on systematic approaches and statistical coordination. It is thought that not only internal consistency of social statistics is essential but also the coherence with economic statistics.

¹ As the scope of this paper does not allow an extensive description of each of these courses, the reader is referred to the website (www.tes.lu) of the TES Institute for details of the courses which have been executed in the past in the CORE programme.

Finally, it should be noted that course development is an ongoing process guided by the demand and suggestions of the client organisations.

3.1.2 Support Courses

Support courses to social statistics will be understood as those courses which are covering areas which are essential for statistical capacity building and thus for the development of social statistics programmes. The paper focuses on courses related to statistical data collection as this is seen as the first building block but it can be argued that other areas in economic statistics like national accounts and price statistics are also relevant as well as areas covering statistical analysis².

The portfolio of the TES Institute covers the following basic courses in the area of data collection methodology³:

DAT-001	Notions of Sampling and Survey for Managers
DAT-002	Sampling Techniques and Practice
DAT-101	Measurement in Surveys
DAT-102	Survey Non-Response: Reduction, Weighting and Imputation
DAT-103	New Advanced Technologies for Data Collection
DAT-105	The Use of Administrative Sources for Statistical Purposes
DAT-208	The Use of the Internet in Relation to On-line Surveys

3.2 SPECIAL COURSES PROGRAMME

As was mentioned in the previous section, the CORE programme is an annual programme designed for EU and EFTA countries. The programme usually consists of 25-30 courses (out of a portfolio of about 90 developed courses). In order to complement this rather rigid structure the TES Institute has developed a more flexible structure, which is referred to as the ‘Special Courses Programme’.

The Special Courses Programme is an instrument to react adequately and timely to ad hoc training requests of countries or groups of countries. The Special Courses Programme also takes the portfolio of about 90 courses as a point of departure and adapts the courses that are requested by a particular client organisation to its specific needs.

Finally, it should be stressed that client organisations may also request courses on new subject matter. Obviously, in that case the preparation time of the course may be longer.

3.3 SUMMER SCHOOLS ON SOCIAL STATISTICS

3.3.1 Introduction

During the period 1998 to 2000 the Siena Group and the TES Institute have jointly organised a series of three Summer Schools on Social Statistics. The objectives, the target

² Details on these courses may also be found in www.tes.lu

³ For details see www.tes.lu. As mentioned in the main text this list only includes the basic courses; more advanced courses are also on offer (see the same site).

group description and the background information on these schools have been summarised below.

3.3.2 Objectives

- To support and complement the activities of the Siena Group on Social Statistics.
- To stimulate progress of new methodologies and technologies in the field of social statistics with particular focus on social indicators.
- To promote the transfer of know-how and best practices between countries, National Statistical Institutes and Universities.
- To encourage co-operation between policy departments, National Statistical Institutes, central, regional and local statistical activities and between the private and the public sector.

3.3.3 Target Group

Statisticians, researchers, policy analysts and policy advisors working in the field of official statistics at the central or local government level, in international organisations, universities and research institutes and the private sector.

3.3.4 Background Information

The increasing concern of national, regional and local governments as well as international organisations with the social condition of the population and its measurement has given rise to heightened interest in a better understanding of social phenomena, which in turn means a demand for new statistical instruments that would allow policy advisors, policy makers and the public to define and monitor social policies with more precision than in the past. This demand for refined statistical instruments has brought about an accelerated development in social concepts, classifications, method for data production and analysis, indicators and systems of social statistics. However, the know-how concerning new methodologies and new techniques in the field of the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of social statistics is not evenly distributed among different professional groups involved in the subject, policy makers and the various sectors of the statistical community.

The Summer School on Social Statistics aimed to bring together an international audience of practitioners and researchers from National Statistical Institutes, universities, private and public research institutions and policy advisors in order to expose them to the latest developments in the field and their applications. It was intended to promote networking, knowledge transfer and synergy between all stakeholders concerned.

The substance to be covered by the proposed Summer School was too vast to be treated in one week. Since the target group concerned was not willing or able to spend more than a week in a training environment, the programme was organised following a three-year sequence of self-contained but interrelated themes corresponding to three societal levels: the micro, the meso and the macro level.

The themes were:

- 1) Inequality and Equity (mainly micro level)

- 2) Participation, Discrimination and Exclusion (mainly meso level)
- 3) Cohesion, Integration and Policy Analysis (mainly macro level)

All three sessions were held in Siena and organised in collaboration with the University of Siena.

In November 2002, during the last meeting of the Siena Group in London a suggestion was made to revive the Summer School on Social Statistics and to aim at extending the target group beyond the highly industrialised countries.

4 Training Priorities for Social Statistics

It cannot be the aim of this paper to come up with a final set of priorities. Instead it tries to highlight a number of main priority areas that may be looked at by the expert group meeting.

A necessary condition for the enhanced quality of social statistics is the application of a sound data collection and survey methodology. Continued training in this area seems fundamental.

Future training should address the methodologies at the basis of an integrated approach to social statistics. Statistical coordination and the development of systems of social statistics should be given due attention.

Training aimed at the dissemination of international classifications and standards looks indispensable if one wants to address systematically the social consequences of globalisation.

Training on measurement techniques of social impact of economic and social policies would help to meet the increasing demand for impact and performance indicators.

Last but not least training platforms need to be created allowing the interaction between statisticians, policy makers, researchers and other users.

Comments and suggestions of the Expert Group will be highly appreciated.

5 Future Contributions of the TES Institute

5.1 COURSES

The current annual CORE Programme and the Special Courses Programme will continue to cater for the training needs of official statisticians around the globe. Client organisations are invited to contact the TES Institute for the registration of their participants in the CORE programme or to discuss and organise special in-country courses in various areas of social statistics or courses covering supporting areas.

As mentioned before, it is the intention to restart the Summer Schools on Social Statistics. They are thought to play an important role in facilitating the contact between statisticians and policy makers and thereby contribution to the development of policy relevant social statistics.

5.2 INSTITUTION BUILDING

As mentioned earlier, the TES Institute may also provide consultancy services cooperating with local organisations to set up national or regional training centres. These services may include both the managerial and the academic (curriculum development) aspects of professional training of statisticians.

6 Partnerships in Training of Statisticians

6.1 MOTIVATION

Partnership in training of official statisticians is understood to be a form of committed co-operation between National Statistical Institutes, International Statistical Agencies, Professional Training Institutes for Statisticians and academic institutions in order to set up training programmes and training aids and to promote exchange as a learning tool.

Is partnership in training of official statisticians attractive? The answer is affirmative for a number of reasons that vary from institutional to economic arguments. The environment in which official statisticians work is characterised by increasing international contacts, an ever increasing need to provide harmonised and thus internationally comparable statistics and growing competition from other information providers. Indeed, the information society is increasingly generating statistical information originating from outside the National Statistical Offices. If these Offices are to be the cornerstones of independence, impartiality and quality in statistics, they have to invest in people, they have to train their staff in order to be able to provide statistical services that can meet internationally accepted quality standards.

Moreover, the target group of official statisticians is a relative small target group, particularly at national level. Therefore it often occurs that the organisation of a course in a specific domain of official statistics is not economically viable when it is done at national level. The experience in Europe has shown that courses organised for an international audience are the appropriate answer.

A third reason to stimulate global partnership is the fact that in the development of new statistical techniques or methodologies often specialisations among statistical offices and/or universities are occurring. It is through international training networks that these “best practices” can be disseminated among countries.

6.2 THE CHARACTER OF THE PARTNERSHIPS

This paper reviews the model for a partnership for training of official statisticians as it was developed by the TES Institute in the European context, not because it is seen as the

best model for all times and all places but simply because it worked very well and it has shown very satisfactory results. The model will be used in this paper as a reference framework.

The model for partnership takes as a starting point that National Statistical Offices as well as International Statistical Organisations are the essential reservoirs of expertise in official statistics.

At the same time the model acknowledges that these organisations do not all have the in-house training capability necessary for development and professional training of their own staff. Amongst other things, this capability depends critically on the size of the organisation.

The above observation, together with the need for dissemination of best practice, the need for harmonisation and the need of international and regional exchange of experience at working level, constitute the basic arguments for international pooling of statistical expertise in the context of regional and global training of official statisticians.

Our European experience has taught us that statistical offices are not equipped for international statistical training and that they are not willing or able to invest in the academic and logistic organisation of international training.

Regional training institutions can fill this gap successfully by playing the role of brokers of statistical expertise at regional level. Co-operation between different regional training institutions can make them clearinghouses of expertise in statistics at a global level.