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Regional initiatives: Regional programme for the improvement of economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific

Proposed regional programme for the improvement of economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific

Note by the secretariat

Summary

At its first session, in February 2009, the Committee on Statistics recognized the urgent need to improve economic statistics in many countries in Asia and the Pacific, and decided that the secretariat should coordinate the development of a regional programme to promote the improvement of economic statistics in the region. The present document contains the proposed regional programme prepared by the secretariat, under the guidance of the Technical Advisory Group established by the Committee and in close consultation with other national and international partners. The document provides a brief overview of the state of economic statistics in the region and describes the principles and strategies that guide the development of the proposed regional programme. It outlines the expected outcome and key components of the regional programme as well as the possible tools and activities required to achieve its objectives. It also includes a proposal on the management arrangement for the implementation of the regional programme and the role that the secretariat could play in its implementation and monitoring.

The Committee may wish to review and endorse the proposed regional programme and provide advice on its implementation. The Committee may also wish to encourage all of its members to endorse the proposed regional programme as a common strategy to guide both national statistical systems and statistics development partners for the improvement of economic statistics in the region.

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Introduction

1. The current document has been formulated on the basis of the draft proposal on the regional programme for the improvement of economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific, as contained in the ESCAP secretariat document E/ESCAP/CST(2)/INF/10. The draft proposal was prepared by the ESCAP secretariat in response to the decisions of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics at its inaugural session, under the guidance of the Bureau of the Committee, with technical advice from the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) established by the Committee, and in close consultation with key global, regional, subregional and national partners.
2. The current document outlines the principles and strategy of the regional programme, describes its main components, and proposes a number of possible mechanisms and means for achieving its objectives. It does not, however, go into the details of the implementation plan for the Programme.
3. It is proposed that a detailed implementation plan for the regional programme shall be prepared in cooperation with the programme partners in early 2011, taking into account of the decisions of the Committee on the current proposal and the results of planned country assessments and other studies.
4. The current proposal recognizes the importance of international standards, methods and frameworks, including the role of the System of National Accounts (SNA) as the common conceptual framework underlying the integration of economic statistics. While the regional programme supports the implementation of the 2008 SNA in Asia and the Pacific, the focus of the programme is on the development of national capacities, within an agreed timeframe, on a number of related elements, which can be seen as necessary preconditions for the production of basic economic statistics.

I. Background

5. The need for a regional programme for economic statistics stems from a set of unique circumstances faced by the 58 ESCAP members and associate members of the Commission, namely:
 - (a) The sheer diversity of the size and complexity of the economies in the region, ranging from small Pacific island nations to those the size of China and Japan. This variation is reflected in the volume of resources currently allocated by national Governments to the collection of economic data, the compilation and dissemination of official statistics and the ability of the national statistical system to meet the demand for such statistics;
 - (b) The enormous variation across the region in the physical, cultural and political environments;
 - (c) The variation in the level of development of national statistical systems, and the reliance of many national statistical systems (NSSs) in the region on technical assistance and funding provided by global, regional and subregional bodies and national agencies located both in and outside the region;
 - (d) The contribution of the economies of the region to world gross domestic product (GDP) is rapidly expanding in relation to other regions of the world, both in absolute and relative terms.

6. The ongoing global economic crisis further highlights the urgent need for timely, reliable and comparable official economic statistics for adequately monitoring financial and economic trends, including the early detection of turning points, and evaluating related economic policies and their impact. However, despite rapid progress in recent years, the current state of economic statistics is very uneven across countries in the Asian and Pacific region. Many countries face tremendous challenges in producing the necessary economic statistics of appropriate quality and methodological transparency for effective monitoring and decision-making.

A. Regional call for urgent action

7. At the inaugural session of the Committee, held in Bangkok from 4 to 6 February 2009, member States recognized an urgent need to improve economic statistics in developing economies of the Asia-Pacific region. The ESCAP secretariat was requested to take action, and the Committee decided:

(a) To adopt a coordinating governance structure that would guide the development, implementation and monitoring of an action plan (regional programme) for the development of economic statistics in the Asian and Pacific region, as proposed in E/ESCAP/CST/5, para. 52;

(b) To establish a technical advisory group to provide guidance to its Bureau and the ESCAP secretariat on methodological issues related to the development and periodic revision of a regional programme for the development of economic statistics. The technical advisory group would be expected to formulate a minimum core set of economic statistics that each country in the Asian and Pacific region would be in a position to produce, taking into account the varying needs of countries and work on the development of economic statistics undertaken by specialized bodies and related organizations in the region.¹

B. Follow-up to Committee decisions

8. In response to the Committee's decisions and recommendations, and under the direct guidance of the Bureau of the Committee, the secretariat set out immediately after the first Committee session to organize work on the development of the regional programme.

9. First, under the guidance of the Bureau of the Committee the secretariat initiated consultations on the terms of reference for the ESCAP TAG on the Development of Economic Statistics. Following an invitation sent to all member States and development partners to join the TAG, the Group was established in August 2009. The TAG consists of 13 senior economic statistics experts from national and international statistical offices,² and is jointly chaired by Mr Jeff Cope of Statistics New Zealand and Mr Kimberly Zieschang of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Its key functions are to formulate a core set of economic statistics as a common regional guideline (henceforth referred to as the "Core Set")

¹ The report of the ESCAP Committee on its first session and related documents can be accessed at <http://www.unescap.org/stat/cst/1/>.

² Including Australia, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, New Zealand, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Secretariat, the Statistical Office of the European Commission (Eurostat), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC).

and provide technical guidance to the secretariat on the development of the regional programme. The TAG has accomplished its task of developing the Core Set (as contained in E/ESCAP/CST(2)/4), and played a key role in the development of the proposal on the regional programme, including by providing inputs into the region-wide assessment of national capacity discussed below.

10. Second, an ESCAP region-wide assessment of the current capacity of NSSs to produce basic economic statistics was conducted during the period May to December 2009. The assessment was conducted using an assessment framework that was developed on the basis of existing frameworks and reviewed by a group of experts. To reduce the burden on the NSSs, the secretariat made extensive use of existing data gathered from international organizations, national websites and other sources, and filled in the relevant information in the assessment for each country. The information was then verified by countries. The results of the assessment, which covers all 58 ESCAP member States in the Asia and Pacific region, provide a basis for identifying priority issues that the regional programme should aim to address.³ The results of the assessment were also shared with the Inter-secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) as inputs to the global 2008 SNA implementation strategy.

11. Thirdly, the secretariat pursued a series of consultations with national and international partners. These included:

(a) An Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the Development of Economic Statistics in the Asian and Pacific Region, Bangkok, 17-18 September 2009;

(b) A Workshop to Develop a Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, 9-11 December 2009;

(c) Meetings of the TAG held back-to-back with the above EGM and workshop;

(d) Consultation initiated by the Bureau of the Committee with heads of national statistical systems in member States on the Core Set, from late August to early September 2010.

II. State of economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific

12. The ESCAP region-wide assessment of the capacity of NSSs in Asia and the Pacific to produce basic economic statistics revealed that the availability and quality of economic statistics in many countries in Asia and the Pacific is far from satisfactory.

13. For example, on the System of National Accounts (SNA) – the common conceptual framework underlying the integration of economic statistics — the assessment found that: (a) only a third of the countries in the region produce all seven of the tables considered by the ISWNGA⁴ as constituting a minimum requirement dataset (MRDS), and only about a quarter of the countries have reached the third of the six ISWGNA milestones; (b) about a third of the countries in the region still compile national accounts at least partly in accordance with the 1968 SNA (second version), the 2008 SNA (fourth version) having been adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2009, whereas only a quarter of the countries have concrete plans to transition fully to the 2008 SNA; and (c) only

³ A comprehensive report of the assessment is contained in E/ESCAP/CST(2)/INF/9.

⁴ See <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/iswngna.asp>.

half of the countries in the region produce quarterly (or monthly) national accounts.

14. On a selected set of other economic statistics, the assessment showed that: (a) while most countries in the region produce statistics on unemployment, wages and earnings, merchandise trade and balance of payment statistics as well as a consumer price index, considerably fewer countries produce producer price and industrial production indexes, less than half produce statistics on retail trade turnover and only a quarter produce volume or turnover in services statistics; and (b) with the exception of statistics on merchandise trade, consumer prices and balance of payments, less than half of all countries in the region produce economic statistics more frequent than annually.

15. While the assessment was only able to address, to a limited extent, the issue of the quality of the economic statistics produced by the NSSs in the region, it revealed that only 59 per cent of the countries in the region have business registers, and that only 29 per cent of the countries in the region produce any seasonally adjusted economic statistics.

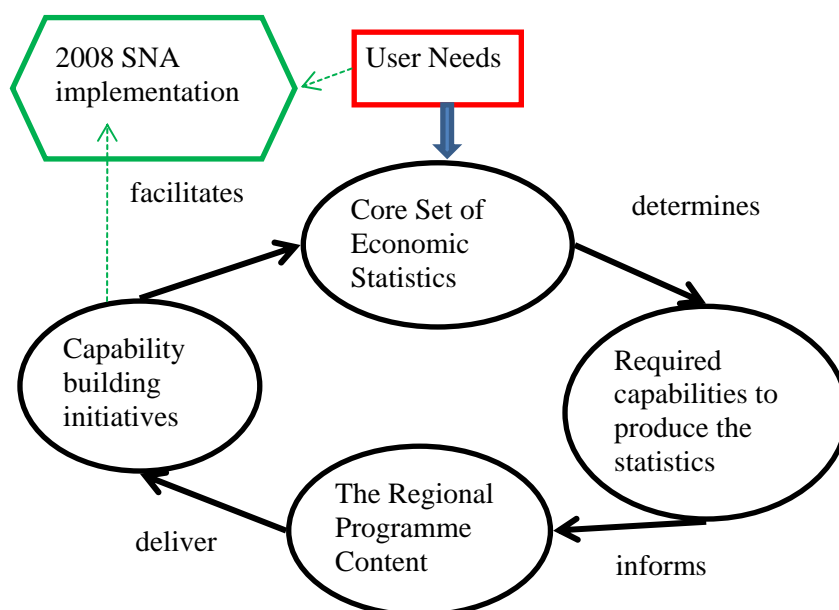
16. The assessment also revealed that many countries in South and South-West Asia and the Pacific, as well as countries with lower incomes and smaller populations, have more difficulties in producing basic economic statistics than others.

III. Guiding principles and strategy

17. Through the region-wide assessment, the work of TAG and the extensive consultations, a set of clear principles and strategy emerged to guide the formulation of the proposed regional programme. The key elements of the strategy for developing and implementing the regional programme are summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Framework for developing and implementing the regional programme



Source: TAG, 2009.

A. Understanding user needs

18. As a starting point, the development of the regional programme requires a clear understanding of user needs for economic statistics. The regional programme shall focus on the data needs for fulfilling some of the fundamental national policy requirements, including for assessing progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

19. The regional programme will also address the data needs for compiling national accounts in accordance with the SNA. While it supports the implementation of the 2008 SNA in Asia and the Pacific, the regional programme focuses on the development of national capacity to produce basic economic statistics. Many of the related elements to be addressed through the regional programme, such as the improvement of human resources and the statistical infrastructure can be seen as necessary preconditions for the production of basic economic statistics of appropriate quality and methodological transparency.

B. Defining common regional aspirations through the Core Set

20. The core set of economic statistics, developed as a common regional guideline, determines the capabilities of national statistical systems required to produce economic statistics, and defines the scope and approaches of the regional programme. The regional programme is, in turn, expected to inform and unify both countries' and development partners' capacity-building initiatives.

21. The Core Set as proposed by the TAG consists of key structural and high-frequency statistics within various domains of economic statistics, each of which is described by its desired minimum frequency and relevant existing international standard and/or guideline.

22. The Core Set takes full account of the role of the System of National Accounts as the common conceptual framework underlying the integration of economic statistics, and fulfils SNA data needs. The formulation of the Core Set is guided by existing work on what may be regarded as a recommended range of economic statistics, including the General Data Dissemination Standard (GDDS) and the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) of IMF and requirements for short-term statistics issued by the European Central Bank (ECB) for monetary policy analysis in the euro area.

23. The Core Set is indicative rather than prescriptive. It recognizes that the size and structure of the economy as well as national priorities vary greatly across countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and provides flexibility to enable each country to tailor each key statistic to national circumstances regarding specific user needs and data sources, among other things.

C. Focusing on capacity development

24. While the regional programme will contribute to the global 2008 SNA implementation strategy, its focus is not on promoting the SNA implementation per se but on supporting the development of national capacity to produce timely and reliable basic economic statistics, which will feed into the production of national accounts.

25. There is a strong consensus among national and international experts that the regional programme should be designed around four pillars of capacity development,: (a) human resource skills development; (b) a limited number of key

statistical infrastructure elements; (c) methodological transparency; and (d) statistical advocacy.

26. The regional programme aims to support capacity development in these areas through a flexible mix of complementary activities, addressing both common needs among countries and country-specific requirements. The initiatives to be designed under the regional programme include (a) organizing advocacy events and developing advocacy tools; (b) assessing national capacities and developing national action plans; (c) formulating regional recommendations; (d) providing advisory services; (e) conducting targeted training; (f) knowledge sharing; and (g) facilitating technical cooperation among countries, including through South-South cooperation.

27. It is expected that the impact of national capacity development as guided by the Core Set could extend beyond economic statistics. For example, the development of human resources, the information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and metadata repositories may be expected to spill-over to national capacities to produce demographic, social and environment statistics.

D. Ensuring relevance and national ownership

28. The regional programme responds directly to the expressed country need for support in improving national capacity to produce economic statistics. For the programme to remain relevant and contribute to sustainable change, countries in the region through the Committee on Statistics must take ownership of the programme and closely guide its development and implementation, with supplementary support from global, regional and subregional development partners.

29. The regional programme will support national efforts to integrate capacity development for producing the Core Set into the long-term strategic planning of the NSSs through, among other things, its inclusion into the National Statistical Development Strategies (NSDSs) and similar statistical capacity development planning tools.

E. Relying on partnership and improving coordination

30. The regional programme is not envisaged primarily as an ESCAP instrument. The implementation of the Programme will be through the work programmes of national statistical systems as well as global, regional and subregional development partners who are funding and providing technical assistance and other initiatives across the region.

31. The success of the regional programme is dependent upon improved coordination among relevant development partners, both as a means for achieving the objectives of the programme and as an outcome in itself.

32. As summarized in Table 1, the regional programme would require partnership with a number of global partners and should seek synergy with many ongoing global initiatives.

Table 1
Global partners and initiatives relevant for the regional programme

Initiative	Partner(s)
Implementation strategy for the 2008 SNA ^a	ISWGNA ^b
2011 round of the International Comparison Programme (ICP)	ICP Executive Board; Asian Development Bank (ADB)
Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics ^c	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
Early Warning and Business Cycle Indicators initiative	United Nations Statistics Division and the Statistical Office of the European Commission (Eurostat)
Principal Global Indicators initiative ^d	Inter-Agency Group on Economic and Financial Statistics ^e
Knowledge Base on Economic Statistics ^f	United Nations Statistics Division
Partner Report on Support to Statistics (PRESS) ^g	Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21 st Century (Paris21)

Notes:

^a Including related standards and guidelines such as the International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics (IRIS 2008), the International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics (IRDTS 2008), the Balance of Payments Manual (BPM6), the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC Rev.4) and the Central Product Classification (CPC Ver.2).

^b IMF, OECD, Eurostat, United Nations Statistics Division and World Bank.

^c See <http://www.icas-v.org/Ag%20Statistics%20Strategy%20Final.doc>.

^d See <http://www.principalglobalindicators.org/>.

^e Bank for International Settlements (BIS), the European Central Bank (ECB), Eurostat, IMF, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations and the World Bank.

^f See <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/EconStatKB/>.

^g See <http://www.paris21.org/pages/partnership/press/>.

33. In addition, global organizations such as FAO, IMF, International Labour Organization (ILO), Paris21, Eurostat, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Statistics Division and the World Bank fund and implement specific capacity-building projects in the region.

34. While the regional implementation of these global initiatives should be, to the extent possible, integrated into the regional programme, the regional programme provides a unique platform for the regional perspectives and priorities to be reflected in the formulation of strategies and programmes of work of these global initiatives. For example, the secretariat is working with the United Nations Statistics Division to reflect, to the extent possible, the priority high-frequency statistics identified in the Core Set in the data template for Early Warning and Business Cycle Indicators. The secretariat is also contributing to the work led by FAO, the World Bank and the United Nations on developing an implementation plan for the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics.

35. Furthermore, the secretariat has initiated discussion with the United Nations Statistics Division and other relevant partners to develop a diagnostic tool

that would allow countries to self-assess the statistical prerequisites, such as classification frameworks, business registers and frames, surveys, administrative data sources and the information technology infrastructure for the production of economic statistics. The secretariat is planning to work with the United Nations Statistics Division to integrate any manuals, advocacy and training materials and good practices generated through the regional programme into the Knowledge Base on Economic Statistics.

36. There are also many regional, subregional, national and bilateral partners that are important for the implementation of the regional programme (see Table 2).

Table 2

Regional, subregional, national and bilateral partners relevant for the regional programme

	Relevant roles	Partners
Regional	Statistical training	Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP); IMF Regional Training Institutes in China, India and Singapore ^a
Subregional	Funding and implementation of specific capacity-building projects; providing country information on the state of economic statistics in the region	ASEAN Secretariat, Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CISSTAT), ^b Economic Cooperation Organization Secretariat (ECO), Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Center (PFTAC) ^c and Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) ^d
National	Statistical training to staff members of NSSs of other countries in the region	National training institutes in Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, New Zealand, Republic of Korea and the United States of America
Bilateral	Funding of statistical capacity-building activities in the region	Development cooperation departments or agencies of countries such as Australia, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States

Notes:

a See <http://www.cisstat.com/eng/>.

b See <http://www.pftac.org/>.

c See <http://www.pftac.org/>.

d See <http://www.spc.int/sdp/>.

37. An important component of the regional programme is to promote coordination of statistical development activities at both the national and international levels. Through the regional coordination mechanism, to be established at the First Meeting of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific (to be held on 14 December 2010), the regional programme will bring

about stronger, coordinated support for statistics development, creating synergies between activities of different development partners.

38. Through statistical advocacy and promoting good practices, the regional programme will also promote the improvement of coordination of statistical activities at the national level, where the production of economic statistics contained in the Core Set often involves multiple data producers. Improved coordination within NSSs will help to ensure that countries maximize the use of limited resources and design and implement coherent capacity-building programmes.

F. Setting signpost, monitoring progress and informing programme changes

39. A target date of 2020 is proposed as the “signpost” for the region with intermediate milestones for 2014 and 2017, to encourage progressive achievement of full country capacity for producing the Core Set of economic statistics.

40. It is proposed that there should be annual reviews of progress of the national implementation of the Core Set (with required methodological transparency) as well as the coordination of statistical capacity-building activities across the region. The Committee on Statistics will play a key role in this process. In addition to self-assessments, peer reviews, data dissemination reports on the observation of standards and codes (ROSCs), the framework developed by the secretariat for the assessment of the state of economic statistics in the countries of Asia and the Pacific could be further refined to become a regular monitoring tool for the region.

41. It is expected that periodic assessments conducted with this monitoring tool, complemented by occasional in-country assessments, will help determine the progress and effectiveness of the regional programme as well as the evolving priorities for national capacity development. The assessments will therefore keep all stakeholders informed and provide the basis for making adjustment to the strategic focus and practical approaches of the regional programme.

IV. Results framework

A. Overall goal and programme outcome

42. The overall goal of the regional programme is to improve the soundness of economic analysis and decision-making by governments, the private sector, the research community and the public through increased availability and effective use of timely, reliable and comparable economic statistics.

43. The expected outcome of the programme is that, by 2020, the national statistical systems of ESCAP member States should have the capacity to produce and disseminate, in accordance with internationally agreed statistical standards and good practices, the Core Set of Economic Statistics required for short- and long-term economic analysis and decision-making in both government and non-government sectors.

B. Key components of the regional programme

44. The proposed regional programme contains 7 key components, ranging from standard setting, to statistical advocacy, capacity development and programme monitoring and knowledge sharing, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3
Key components of the regional programme

Number	Components/Subcomponents
1	Endorsement of the Core Set as regional guideline
2	Strengthening of statistical advocacy
3	Development of human resource skills
4	Improvement of statistical infrastructure
4.1	Adoption of internationally recognized quality assessment frameworks
4.2	Development of metadata repositories
4.3	Development of business registers
4.4	Adoption of modern statistical data editing techniques
5	Improvement in coordination
6	Progress monitoring and programme review
6.1	Monitoring the progress in national capacity development
6.2	Monitoring the implementation of the regional programme
7	Knowledge sharing and South-South cooperation

C. Programme components and activities

Component 1

Endorsement of the Core Set as regional guideline

Objective

45. To secure government commitment to the Core Set as a common regional guideline so that NSSs in the ESCAP region will have the necessary political and financial support for developing the required national capacity to produce the Core Set.

Proposed activities

1 (a) - Seek endorsement by the Commission of the Core Set as a regional guideline to secure the political commitment from ESCAP member States to support NSSs in developing the capacity to produce a minimum set of economic statistics that are essential for sound economic analysis and decision-making.

1 (b) - Promote the full integration in NSDS or similar national strategic plans of the development of national capacity to produce the core set of economic statistics.

1 (c) - Produce and disseminate a handbook on good practices for the collection of economic data and the compilation, analysis and dissemination of economic statistics in the Core Set.

Component 2

Strengthening of statistical advocacy

Objective

46. To increase the understanding among member States in the ESCAP region of the importance of investing in the improvement of national capacity to produce the Core Set.

Proposed activities

2 (a) - Develop a small number of advocacy tools, for use by NSSs and development partners, that demonstrate the benefits of investing in the improvement of economic statistics and the need for development of national capacity to produce the Core Set.

2 (b) - Support national and subregional statistical advocacy activities by, among other things, organizing relevant workshops to raise awareness among policymakers of the importance of investing in capacity development of NSSs to produce the Core Set.

2 (c) - Conduct regular assessments and disseminate relevant reports on the capacity of countries in the ESCAP region to produce the Core Set.

Component 3

Development of human resource skills

Objective

47. To improve the human resource skills of NSS staff in a small number of areas that are essential for the collection of economic data and for the compilation, analysis and dissemination of the Core Set.

Proposed activities

3 (a) - Define a set of standard skills required for producing the Core Set, guided by reviews of individual country requirements and the Core Skills Framework for NSOs in Developing Countries (CSF) developed by SIAP.⁵

3 (b) - Identify priority training needs in the region for producing the Core Set through, among other things, SIAP's Training Needs Survey, the ESCAP region-wide assessment of the capacity of NSSs to produce economic statistics, in-country needs assessments and other available mechanisms.

3 (c) - Develop and deliver targeted regional, subregional and national training courses for staff of NSSs involved in the production of the Core Set.

⁵ The CSF identifies the skills required of officials working at all levels of the national statistical system. The framework can be used by: (a) individuals to manage their own development and to identify the skills they need to progress in their career; (b) managers to identify which additional skills their staff need and what skills they need to be looking for in new appointees; and (c) trainers to identify what skills they should provide training in.

3 (d) - Develop a training programme on the Core Set for training of trainers to increase NSSs' training capacity to deliver localized and targeted training for skills development among NSS staff.

3 (e) - Provide advisory services to enhance the capacity of NSSs to develop and deliver relevant in-country training.

3 (f) - Develop an online database of interactive training modules and other training materials to support self-learning among NSS staff for developing skills required for producing the Core Set.

3 (g) - Establish a mechanism to facilitate staff exchange (between NSSs and between NSSs and international organizations) and cooperation between NSSs to promote application of good practices in producing the Core Set.

3 (h) - Establish a regional training coordination mechanism among relevant training institutions in the region to improve the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of statistical training, including training related to the Core Set.

Component 4

Improvement of statistical infrastructure

Objective

48. To improve the capacity of NSSs to develop, implement and maintain key elements of national statistical infrastructures, including quality assessment frameworks, metadata repositories, and business registers, for the production and dissemination of the Core Set.

Subcomponent 4.1

Adoption of internationally recognized quality assessment frameworks

Objective

49. All NSSs in the ESCAP region should, by 2020, use an internationally recognized quality assessment framework, such as the IMF's Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF), to assess the quality of the economic statistics systematically and periodically.

Proposed activities

4.1 (a) - Encourage countries in the region that do not yet subscribe to either the SDDS or GDDS or similar standards/recommendations (mostly small island developing States and least developed countries with relatively small populations),⁶ to adopt the DQAF or other accepted international quality assurance frameworks for the systematic assessment of economic statistics.

4.1 (b) - Develop and deliver training modules on internationally recognized quality assessment frameworks specifically geared towards smaller member States that currently do not use such frameworks.

⁶ A total of 25 countries in the region do not yet subscribe to either the SDDS or GDDS, 17 of which are small island developing States (of which 16 are in the Pacific subregion) and a further 3 (Bhutan, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Timor-Leste) are least developed countries with relatively small populations.

4.1 (c) - Develop and implement a support mechanism, including a regional network of experts and e-learning programmes, to implement and sustain adherence to the quality assessment framework.

Subcomponent 4.2

Establishment of metadata repositories

Objective

50. All NSSs in ESCAP regional should, by 2020, have appropriate metadata repositories in which methodological information (metadata) for the core set of economic statistics being compiled can be stored and made readily available on their website, to the users.

Proposed activities

4.2 (a) - Provide targeted training to staff of NSSs in relevant international metadata standards, including the Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX),⁷ Data Documentation Initiative (DDI)⁸ and Dublin Core.⁹

4.2 (b) - Provide technical assistance to NSSs in documenting data using the relevant international metadata standards.

4.2 (c) - Support NSSs in the selection of suitable technical solutions for storing and accessing metadata in metadata repositories.

4.2 (d) - Compile and disseminate information on current national practices related to the use of metadata standards, such as SDMX, DDI and Dublin Core.

Subcomponent 4.3

Development of business registers

Objective

51. All NSSs in the ESCAP region should have, by 2020, developed and be able to maintain appropriate business registers that address their needs and requirements.¹⁰

Proposed activities

4.3 (a) - Develop a common regional framework for the content, coverage and quality of business registers.

⁷ See <http://sdmx.org/>.

⁸ See <http://www.ddialliance.org>.

⁹ See <http://dublincore.org>.

¹⁰ Business registers provide a central sampling frame for a range of business surveys conducted by NSSs. Their development is essential for the full coordination between different surveys. NSSs should have business registers that are able, in a specific national contexts, to fulfil the following key functions: (a) the detection and construction of statistical units; (b) the preparation and coordination of surveys and grossing-up survey results; (c) a source of information for the statistical analysis of the business population and its demography; (d) the use of administrative data; and (e) an integration and dissemination tool. See Eurostat Methodologies and Working Papers, *Business Registers: Recommendations Manual, 2010 edition*, pages 18-19 (available at http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-32-10-216-EN-C/EN/KS-32-10-216-EN-C-EN.PDF)

4.3 (b) - Establish a regional forum for business register experts to meet regularly (every 2 years) and exchange their experiences and share good practices

4.3 (c) - Produce a regional manual on business registers, including documented good practices.

4.3 (d) - Produce periodic assessments of the quality of existing business registers among countries in the ESCAP region, through a benchmarking exercise and, subsequently, the administration of a periodic questionnaire and regional meetings.

4.3 (e) - Identify and develop a set of skills needed for staff of NSSs to build and maintain business registers that meets the requirements of the NSSs.

Subcomponent 4.4

Adoption of modern statistical data editing techniques

Objective

52. All NSSs in the ESCAP region should, by 2020, use modern statistical data editing (SDE) techniques for the processing of the raw economic census and survey data, required for production of the Core Set.

Proposed activities

4.4 (a) - Conduct an assessment of existing SDE practices used in the processing of raw economic census and survey data and the resulting quality of the edited data.

4.4 (b) - Develop training courses aimed at introducing modern SDE concepts, techniques and good practices to economic survey statisticians of NSSs.

4.4 (c) - Promote the improvement of the quality, in particular the accuracy and timeliness, of (economic) survey data in national work programmes.

4.4 (d) - Provide technical assistance to NSSs in improved SDE techniques for processing data from a number of selected economic surveys.

Component 5

Improvement in coordination

Objective

53. To increase the consistency and coherence of national statistical capacity building programmes and maximize the effectiveness of the available resources, through improved coordination of statistical development activities, both within NSSs and among development partners,

Proposed activities

5.1 (a) - Promote good practices in effective national coordination and cooperation within NSSs among member States in the ESCAP region through facilitating the sharing of experiences between member States and promoting good practices through the knowledge network.

5.1 (b) - Produce advocacy materials to support NSSs in securing political commitment and legislative support for improving coordination and cooperation within the NSS.

5.1 (c) - Develop the implementation plan for the proposed regional programme through close partnership among all relevant development partners to maximize the use of available resources and utilize synergies between their capacity-building activities.

5.1 (d) - Establish a platform for active coordination and cooperation through the Meetings of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific, under the guidance of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics and taking into account existing mechanisms,¹¹ including those for the exchange of information on ongoing and planned activities among relevant development partners involved in the regional programme and other capacity-building activities in the ESCAP region.

5.1 (e) - Provide periodic reports of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific to the Committee on Statistics to ensure that member States are informed of and actively contribute to the coordination of capacity-building activities in the ESCAP region.

5.1 (f) - Establish a regional repository of national strategic plans for statistical development and multi-year work plans of NSSs to direct development partners in developing and implementing capacity development programmes that support national priorities, and to facilitate technical cooperation among ESCAP member States.

Component 6

Progress monitoring and programme review

Objective

54. To effectively support the implementation of the regional programme through effective monitoring and reporting.

Subcomponent 6.1

Monitoring the progress of national capacity development

Objective

55. To monitor progress in the development of capacity of the NSSs to produce the Core Set to ensure that the regional programme is responding to the evolving needs of countries.

Proposed activities

6.1 (a) - Conduct regular assessments of the capacity of NSSs in the ESCAP region to produce and disseminate the Core Set and their specific needs for support in capacity development.

6.1 (b) - Develop, with relevant global partners, a common diagnostic tool that allows countries to self-assess the statistical prerequisites for the production of economic statistics and permits the benchmarking of these prerequisites against those of other countries in the region.

¹¹ Pursuant to United Nations Statistical Commission decision 40/112, para. (f) (see E/CN.3/2009/29, Chap I, Sect. B), the secretariat has started preparing for the First Meeting of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific, which is scheduled to be held in Bangkok on 14 December 2010.

6.1 (c) - Provide stakeholders with periodic reports on the progress achievement by NSSs in the ESCAP region in developing the capacity to produce the Core Set and their specific needs for support.

Subcomponent 6.2

Monitoring the implementation of the regional programme

56. Provide regular updates to the stakeholders on the impact of the regional programme, and review/revise the regional programme accordingly.

Objective

57. To assess the status of the implementation of the regional programme, the progress made in meeting its deliverables, and to ensure that if needed, corrective actions are taken.

Proposed activities

6.2 (a) - Using the results of the assessments, information provided by the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific and other available data, monitor the status of the implementation of the regional programme.

6.2 (b) - Review and modify the regional programme on a regular basis to take account of emerging needs and changes in priorities.

Component 7

Knowledge sharing and South-South cooperation

Objective

58. To promote the effective sharing of knowledge, experience and technical know how and to facilitate South-South cooperation for improving national capacity to produce the Core Set among NSSs in the ESCAP region.

Proposed activities

7 (a) - Establish a regional skills network of experienced national and international economic statisticians to promote the exchange of knowledge and good practices, support skills development and facilitate South-South cooperation among countries in the ESCAP region.

7 (b) - Establish a dedicated online knowledge network, including a database that contains good practices among NSSs in producing and disseminating the Core Set, relevant training materials and training activities and link it with other relevant international databases and/or websites, including the Knowledge Database on Economic Statistics maintained by the United Nations Statistics Division and the knowledge networks of other relevant development partners.

7 (c) - Establish a database of experts that NSSs and development partners could draw on when planning and organizing activities related to the Core Set in the region or requiring technical assistance.

7 (d) - Establish a facility to promote and facilitate South-South cooperation.

V. Role of the secretariat

59. The secretariat will support the further development and implementation of the regional programme through: (a) its regular budget activities; (b) its regular programme of technical cooperation and secured extrabudgetary activities; and (c) extrabudgetary activities for which funding needs to be raised.

A. Regular budget activities

60. Through its regular budget activities, the secretariat could take on the following roles:

(a) Custodian and coordinator of the regional programme, including its periodic revisions and the monitoring of the its implementation through periodic assessments of the capacity of countries to produce economic statistics [Components 1 and 6];

(b) Secretariat of (i) the Committee on Statistics and its Bureau; and (ii) the steering group for the regional programme [Component 6];

(c) Secretariat of the coordination mechanism established through the First Meeting of Partners for Support in Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific [Component 5].

61. In addition, the regular budget allows the secretariat to organize occasional expert group meetings on issues relevant to the regional programme.

B. Regular technical cooperation programme and extrabudgetary training activities

62. Through its regular programme of technical cooperation and secured extrabudgetary funding, the secretariat may contribute to the implementation of the regional programme through:

(a) The provision of advisory services related to economic statistics to NSSs in the region [Components 2-5];

(b) The provision of training courses related to economic statistics to staff of NSSs in the region [Components 2-5], through existing SIAP training programmes.

C. Additional funding support

63. Subject to the raising of additional extrabudgetary funding, the secretariat has the capacity to contribute to the implementation of the regional programme in the following ways:

(a) Through SIAP, the provision of country/subregional training courses specifically designed to build the capacity of countries to collect data for, compile and disseminate the Core Set of Economic Statistics [Components 3 and 4];

(b) Through SIAP, the provision of training courses aimed at improving the capacity of countries to compile high-quality national accounts in accordance with international standards and frameworks, including the 2008 SNA [Components 3 and 4];

- (c) In cooperation with interested development partners, support:
- i. The development and country-level implementation of statistical advocacy tools that demonstrate the benefits of good economic statistics versus the costs of bad economic statistics [Component 2];
 - ii. The implementation of international standards and guidelines for the compilation of high-frequency economic statistics in the Core Set through, among other things, the introduction and implementation of seasonal adjustment techniques [Component 3];
 - iii. The implementation of internationally recognized quality assessment frameworks [Component 4.1];
 - iv. The implementation of international metadata standards and the establishment and regular updating of metadata repositories [Component 4.2];
 - v. The development and improvement of business registers [Component 4.3];
 - vi. The introduction and implementation of modern statistical data editing techniques [Component 4.4];
 - vii. The sharing of knowledge and experience in the collection and processing of economic data and the compilation, analysis and dissemination of economic statistics in the Core Set through, among other things, the preparation and dissemination of a handbook on good practices [Component 7].

VI. Management arrangements

64. The Committee on Statistics will have the ultimate “ownership” of the regional programme and will oversee its further development and implementation. To ensure that the regional programme remains relevant and leads to sustainable results, the Committee will periodically review its progress, identify emerging needs and decide on necessary strategic adjustments to the programme.

65. The Bureau of the Committee will guide the secretariat in coordinating the follow-up actions required in accordance with the Committee’s decisions and recommendations on the regional programme.

66. Considering the scale, complexity and timeframe of the regional programme, it is proposed that the Committee establish a dedicated steering group to directly oversee the implementation of the programme.

67. It is proposed that the steering group, a “long-standing” body—to remain in place for the duration of the regional programme to ensure continuity and stability in its programme management—be comprised of leading national and international economic statisticians. The group will direct the development of the implementation plan for the regional programme, provide both strategic and technical advice to the secretariat for its day-to-day management, monitor progress in its implementation and propose any adjustments required. It may report to the Committee on the management and implementation of the regional programme and seek its direction.

68. It is proposed that the current TAG, having effectively fulfilled the mandate given to it by the Committee at its first session (see E/ESCAP/65/13, decision 1/2, para. (b)), be transformed into the proposed steering group. Detailed

terms of reference for the steering group could be developed and its membership be defined under the guidance of the Bureau of the Committee.

69. It is also proposed that, within each country participating in the regional programme, the national statistical office (NSO) would function as the focal point for the entire NSS; and a National Coordinator should be nominated by the head of the NSO to liaise with the secretariat on relevant activities.

VII. Conclusions

70. The Committee may wish to review and endorse the draft regional programme and provide advice on its implementation. The Committee may also wish to encourage all of its members to endorse the draft regional programme as a formal strategy for the improvement of economic statistics in the region. In particular, the Committee may wish to:

(a) Endorse the proposed principles and strategy underpinning the regional programme;

(b) Review the proposed key components and main activities of the regional programme;

(c) Review the proposed management arrangements;

(d) Endorse the proposal for a transformation of the TAG into a steering group for the regional programme and review of its terms of reference and membership;

(e) Provide its views on the proposed role of the secretariat in the implementation of the regional programme;

(f) Encourage member States and development partners to actively support the implementation of the regional programme, including via the provision of the necessary funding and other resources and through active coordination of efforts.
