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### Statistical Commission

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**Items for information: coordination and integration  
of statistical programmes**

### Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

#### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report summarizes the main conclusions of the eleventh and twelfth sessions of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, held in New York on 25 February 2008 and in Tunis on 11 and 12 September 2008. The new terms of reference of the Committee, reviewed and approved at its twelfth session, are contained in the annex to the present report.

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## **I. Introduction**

1. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities held two sessions in 2008. The eleventh session of the Committee was held on 25 February 2008 in New York during the thirty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission, while the twelfth meeting of the Committee, hosted by the African Development Bank, was held in Tunis from 11 to 12 September 2008. Both meetings were co-chaired by the United Nations Statistics Division and Eurostat. The present report summarizes the main conclusions of the eleventh and twelfth sessions of the Committee.

## **II. Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities**

### **A. Revised terms of reference of the Committee**

2. At its eleventh session, the Committee discussed the need to streamline its existing terms of reference. The discussion focused on the scope and mechanisms of cooperation. The Committee agreed that in order to address the fundamental issues raised by members, the terms of reference should be redrafted and circulated to the members for their written comments.

3. The revised terms of reference prepared by the two Co-Chairs and the secretariat were discussed and formally endorsed at the twelfth session of the Committee. The new terms of reference were approved by consensus. The final version of the terms of reference was posted on the Committee's website and is set out in the annex to the present report.

4. The differences between the new and previous terms of reference can be summarized as follows:

(a) The structure of the terms of reference was changed, making a clear distinction between the mission, the key activities and functions, and the working modalities. The key activities and functions have been organized along six main lines: efficient functioning of the statistical system; common standards and platforms; development of methodologies; inter-institutional support; outreach; and advocacy for statistics;

(b) In the mission statement and the key activities and functions, the role of the Committee and its members has been made more explicit, including in emphasizing that Committee members should actively contribute to the development of a coordinated global statistical system;

(c) The new mission statement makes explicit reference to the constraints of the governance arrangements and the resource envelopes of the members;

(d) The following elements of the working modalities of the new terms of reference are also worth mentioning: (a) the distinction between members and observers has been eliminated since the distinction has not proved to be meaningful or useful for the work of the Committee in practice; (b) formulations for decisions on the agenda of the meetings, accepting and rejecting members and sunset clauses for task teams have been added or improved; (c) the permanent secretariat role of the United Nations Statistics Division has been maintained since this is considered

the most effective way of linking the Committee to the rest of the global statistical system.

## **B. Rome conference on data quality for international organizations**

5. The conferences on data quality for international organizations have been held since 2004 on a biennial basis under the auspices of the Committee. The 2008 conference, held in Rome on 7 and 8 July 2008, was the third such conference dedicated entirely to quality issues, following the 2004 conference in Wiesbaden, Germany, and the 2006 conference in Newport, Wales, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

6. The Rome conference was organized by Eurostat, in cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division, and was hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The conference was attended by about 40 participants from 15 international or supranational organizations. The conference sessions were structured to cover the following five main themes: (a) quality assessment and the use of checklists and user surveys, collection of quality metadata, dissemination of quality information and training in quality management; (b) international cooperation on quality management, including principles, harmonization of frameworks, peer reviews and support of countries; (c) dissemination platforms to improve data accessibility and interpretability; (d) best practices in imputation and estimation; and (e) round table on the theme “The implications for data quality of making data internationally comparable, or of respecting national, but not comparable sources”.

7. The Rome conference served as a useful forum for participants from international and supranational organizations to discuss specific data quality issues related to their work and to exchange experiences regarding the various quality mechanisms developed for improving the collection and dissemination of international data.

8. The next steps in the work of the Committee in the field of quality assurance frameworks were formally agreed at the twelfth meeting of the Committee. Eurostat agreed to prepare a comprehensive document for the Statistical Commission at its forty-first session, in February 2010. A proposal, prepared by the two Co-Chairs, on the topics and formats of future Committee special events will be discussed at the thirteenth session of the Committee, in February 2009.

## **C. Coordination of statistical capacity-building activities**

9. The Committee reviewed progress made by the four task teams established during its eighth session, with the aim of improving the work in specific areas of inter-agency coordination in terms of capacity-building activities and technical assistance to countries, as follows:

(a) Task team 1: reporting mechanisms on statistical capacity-building activities. The Committee welcomed the work done by task team 1, led by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century. The Committee agreed that the classification of statistical areas in the domain of statistical capacity-building was appropriate for fulfilling the specific need of the

team, namely, to have a coherent framework for assembling the information provided by the international agencies, but might need to be revisited in the future. The Committee also expressed concerns about the fact that some of the major players providing support to statistical development had not responded to the partner reporting on support to statistics questionnaire. The task team was requested to submit the finalized project inventory at the February 2009 meeting of the Committee, together with a short note on how to meet the information-sharing objective more effectively;

(b) Task team 2: capacity-building regional training initiatives for national statisticians. The United Nations Statistics Division, the lead agency for the task team, presented the task team report. The report included an inventory of regional training centres and national training centres that provided training to official statisticians outside the country. Some members indicated that there were additional training centres that qualified for inclusion in the inventory. It was agreed that the Committee members would have an opportunity to provide final inputs into the inventory. The Committee considered the terms of reference of the task team as being completed. The report and final inventory of training centres is available from the Committee website;

(c) Task team 3: review of modalities for the coordination of technical cooperation programmes at the subregional level. The World Bank presented the draft report of task team 3. Members were asked to provide comments on the draft report. The World Bank agreed to finalize the report and post it on the Committee website. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the World Bank for the work well done and agreed that the work of the task team 3 had been completed;

(d) Task team 4: assessment of the effectiveness of capacity-building activities in Africa. The African Development Bank presented the paper prepared by the African Centre for Statistics on construction of the African statistical development index. The index aims at measuring progress towards implementation of the regional strategic framework for statistical capacity-building in Africa; identifying strengths and weaknesses of countries; and clustering country performances. The Committee recognized the potential use of the index for monitoring statistical development in Africa and encouraged the task team to continue its work. Members agreed that a comprehensive report about the outcome of the work of the task team should be submitted at the 2010 meeting of the African Statistical Commission.

10. At its twelfth session, the Committee held an extensive debate on how to improve donor coordination in statistical capacity-building activities. In that regard, the members reached a consensus on the necessity of having an effective information tool that was forward-looking and allowed sharing of information for advanced planning. The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century, as a lead organization of task team 1, agreed to elaborate on the issue in a note, which will be submitted to the Committee at its thirteenth session, on how to meet the information-sharing objective more effectively.

#### **D. Use of population estimates by international organizations**

11. According to a request of the Committee, the United Nations Population Division submitted the report of the task team on population estimates to the

Committee at its twelfth session. The report considered the first two objectives of the team's terms of reference, namely, to: (a) review and recommend ways to improve consultations with countries in the process of producing national estimates; and (b) indicate to agencies how to factor in changes in the population figures from one revision to the next. The report also provided conclusions for them. Some words of caution from the Committee were given on the work of the task team on developing internationally agreed standards on annual population statistics.

12. The Committee stressed the need for inclusion of user involvement and the issue of geographic coverage and territorial conflict areas in the task team reports. The proposal for the increased role of the regional commissions was welcomed. Caution with the use of country data was advised. The data used for population estimates should be of good quality, compiled in a transparent way and accompanied with metadata.

13. The Committee welcomed the report and congratulated the task team on its work, noting that additional steps would have still to be undertaken in order for the team to complete its third objective. The task team was invited to work on the third part of the mandate and submit the final report to the Committee at its fourteenth session, in September 2009.

#### **E. Modalities of data sharing among international organizations**

14. During its twelfth session, the Committee discussed the report prepared by the Economic Commission for Europe on the modalities of data sharing among international organizations. The Committee agreed that further work in exploring best practices with respect to data sharing among international organizations would be necessary. The Committee was also of the view that a constructive position, without involving legal terms, on the issue should be taken. It was agreed that a new task team, led by the European Central Bank would be established. Eurostat, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank and the World Tourism Organization volunteered to be part of the task team. The European Central Bank agreed to draft the terms of reference of the task team and circulate them among the Committee members.

#### **F. Further involvement of national and international agencies in the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange**

15. The Committee has continued its discussions on the involvement of national and international agencies in the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange, after recognition by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session (see S/2008/24, chap. I.B, decision 39/112), in February 2008, of the initiative as the preferred standard for the exchange and sharing of data and metadata. During its eleventh and twelfth sessions, the Committee was updated by the sponsors of the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange on developments in implementing the initiative, with respect to the action plan on international capacity-building and outreach, including the involvement of national and international agencies (e.g., creation of an advisory group and fostering collaboration, including through meetings and conferences). The Committee was also informed about the global Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange conference to be organized in January 2009.

**G. Other issues**

16. At the twelfth session of the Committee, the United Nations Statistics Division announced the proposal for observation of a World Statistics Day on 20 October 2010. The Committee members were invited to support the initiative and submit their suggestions on how best to make it operational. International and regional agencies were encouraged to take full advantage of the initiative and use it to promote support for official statistics.

## Annex

### Terms of reference of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, September 2008

#### Mission statement

1. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities promotes inter-agency coordination and cooperation on statistical programmes and consistency in statistical practices and development.
2. As a forum of committed members, the Committee fosters good practices in the statistical activities of international organizations,<sup>a</sup> in accordance with the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities, and within the constraints of their own governance arrangements and resource envelopes.
3. The members of the Committee are committed to contributing actively to the development of a coordinated global statistical system producing and disseminating high-quality statistics, for example, by facilitating the development of well-functioning regional and national statistical systems.

#### Key activities and functions

4. The key activities and functions of the Committee are summarized along the following six main lines:
  - **Efficient functioning of the statistical system.** The Committee contributes to the coordination of statistical activities of international organizations in order to promote good statistical practices and the mutual consistency of disseminated data, minimize duplication and reduce the reporting and meetings burdens on countries; the Committee promotes coordination of statistical actions required from international organizations by intergovernmental meetings, including the Statistical Commission.
  - **Common standards and platforms.** The Committee promotes the development, adoption and use by international organizations of common standards and platforms for the production of data and metadata, with the aim of creating a coordinated, global and high-quality statistical system.
  - **Development of methodologies.** The Committee contributes to the coordination of the work on methodological development in statistics, aiming at ensuring internationally agreed standards for official statistics and facilitating their use in countries and international organizations.
  - **Inter-institutional support.** The Committee provides a forum for its members to share experiences and best practices and provides guidance and suggestions on how to address challenges related to international statistical activities, including the availability, quality and interchange of data and organizational aspects.

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<sup>a</sup> The term "international organizations" includes supranational organizations.



- **Outreach.** The Committee promotes and contributes to the coordination of the design and delivery of the capacity-building services of its members in official statistics. It shares experiences in all statistical fields, including training and technological tools, involving in its work, where appropriate, other stakeholders in the global statistical system, such as national statisticians and policymakers.
- **Advocacy for statistics.** The Committee shares experiences about ways to promote and gain recognition for the role of statistics within international organizations, for the implementation of the Principles Governing Statistical Activities and for maintaining and improving the suitability of governance arrangements that are supportive to that function.

5. The work of the Committee is organized under the working modalities established by the Committee, as outlined in appendix 1.

## Appendix 1

### **Working modalities of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities**

#### **A. Membership and level of representation**

1. The members of the Committee comprise international and supranational organizations, whose mandate includes the provision of international official statistics in the context of the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities, and which have a permanent embedded statistical service in their organization and regular contacts with countries, as listed in appendix 2.
2. Prospective members should apply to the secretariat. New members of the Committee need the approval of two thirds of the current members. Any such application for membership implies acceptance of the Committee mandate and a commitment to contribute to its work and to attend meetings on a regular basis.
3. Membership in the Committee may be terminated for any organization which, in the view of at least two thirds of current members, shows insufficient commitment to the work of the Committee or which breaches the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities.
4. Representation in the Committee should be at the level of Director of an organization's statistical service or equivalent. Participation at the highest statistical level is considered indispensable for the effectiveness of the Committee's work.

#### **B. Management and organization**

##### **Chairs**

5. The Committee elects two Co-Chairs, taking into account the diversity of its membership. They will serve for a two-year period and are each eligible for re-election for a second two-year term.

##### **Functions of the Co-Chairs**

6. The functions are to:
  - (a) Decide on the draft agenda items as proposed by the secretariat, based on decisions taken at the previous session of the Committee and on subsequent requests by members;
  - (b) Direct the sessions of the Committee, including summarizing the discussion of each agenda item as a basis for preparing the report of the session;
  - (c) Propose draft minutes of the meetings, as prepared by the secretariat, to be approved by written procedure by all the members who attended the meeting;
  - (d) Represent the Committee whenever its members consider it necessary;
  - (e) Invite, on a proposal from one or more of the members, observers to participate in the work of Committee.

## **Secretariat**

7. The secretariat of the Committee is situated at the United Nations Statistics Division. It receives no financial assistance but may, on an ad hoc basis, seek the assistance of other members.

8. In direct collaboration with the Co-Chairs, and following consultation with members, the secretariat prepares the draft agenda for the meetings of the Committee and ensures that all documentation received and approved by the Co-Chairs, along with all other necessary information, is made available to its members. It is also responsible for organizing Committee's meetings and for coordinating with the agreed host of a given Committee meeting.

9. Between sessions, the secretariat reminds members, especially those responsible for leading task teams, of their commitments to produce outputs and reports, as agreed at Committee meetings.

10. The secretariat is also responsible for liaising with the Co-Chairs of the Committee and preparing the draft report of each session. As per an ad hoc request from the Committee, the process of submitting any document to the High-level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations Chief Executives Board on Coordination is arranged by the secretariat, in cooperation with the Co-Chairs and the author(s) of the document.

11. The secretariat keeps the Committee website up-to-date, including its task teams. The website is hosted by the United Nations Statistics Division.

12. The secretariat prepares the draft annual report to the Statistical Commission for approval by the Co-Chairs.

## **C. Meetings**

### **Regular meetings**

13. The Committee holds an official meeting at least once a year. The exact timing and length of the meetings are dictated by substance and needs. In principle, it is expected that there will be one annual meeting of two to three days' duration in September. An additional meeting is also expected, in conjunction with each session of the Statistical Commission, for taking up any issues that need to be considered at that time and to review the proposed agenda and need for the next scheduled Committee session.

14. Side events may also be held in conjunction with the main session of the Committee. These will be limited in number and will be organized by the relevant agencies, with no assistance from the secretariat. Also, since formal Committee meetings provide an excellent opportunity for bilateral and multilateral discussions and networking, some time can be set aside in the meetings schedule for such activities.

### **Special sessions**

15. Special sessions are devoted to topics of special importance to the Committee or one of its task teams, allowing for a more in-depth exchange and for the

presentation of technical papers and contributions by members. Special sessions normally have a duration of half a day.

#### **Agenda of the meetings**

16. Topics on the agenda are distinguished as “decision” and “information” items. The Co-Chairs of the Committee and its secretariat determine the category of each agenda item based on written proposals from members. Decision items are presented and discussed, while information items are not presented and discussion on them is optional.

17. Coordination of activities between meetings, for example, through electronic discussion groups and follow-up to decisions taken at meetings, is an important and integral part of the work of the Committee.

18. Papers for meetings should be made available to members at least three weeks prior to meetings.

#### **D. Ways of operating**

19. Consensus during sessions is determined by the Co-Chairs and reported in the minutes of the meeting. A report on decisions and actions only is prepared for adoption at the end of each Committee meeting. The report should specify the lead agencies responsible for any action and follow-up.

20. An annual report is also made available to the Statistical Commission for communicating important decisions and key issues and for ensuring recognition of its work and decisions.

21. The Committee can decide at its meeting whether to refer a report on a specific issue to the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

22. The Committee functions on a task-oriented basis, using lead agency arrangements. When agreed by members of the Committee, and based on a written mandate that includes a sunset clause, task teams can be created to address specific topics. Their terms of reference are approved by the Committee, and the task teams are led by one or more appointed members of the Committee. Task teams can establish the most appropriate working arrangements and hold their own meetings, if necessary, with no financial implications for the Committee secretariat. Task teams report on progress and results to the Committee at its regular sessions.

## Appendix 2

### **Membership of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, as at 12 September 2008**

United Nations Statistics Division

United Nations Population Division

Economic Commission for Europe

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Economic Commission for Africa

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

United Nations Children's Fund

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

United Nations Development Programme

United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

United Nations Population Fund

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

International Labour Organization

International Monetary Fund

International Telecommunication Union

World Health Organization (including Pan American Health Organization, Health Metrics Network)

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

World Trade Organization

World Bank

African Development Bank

Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics

Asian Development Bank

Bank for International Settlements

Caribbean Community Secretariat

European Central Bank

Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century

Statistical Office of the European Communities

Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries

Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa

World Tourism Organization

International Atomic Energy Agency

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