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## Statistical Commission

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Item 3 (l) of the provisional agenda\*

### Items for discussion and decision

## Statistical capacity-building

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the United Nations Statistics Division to support national efforts in building and strengthening national statistical capacity. In particular, it reports how the programme of the Division responds to the requests of the Economic and Social Council and, more recently, the General Assembly and has increased its efforts in statistical capacity-building. The report describes the capacity-building approach, the activities and multi-year projects organized and executed by the Division in specific statistical domains, including the Millennium Development Goal indicators and the Division's future plans. The Commission may wish to comment on the conclusions presented in the last paragraph.

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\* E/CN.3/2011/1.

## I. Introduction

1. Heads of State and Government, gathered at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 20 to 22 September 2010 for the Millennium Development Goals Summit, reaffirmed their resolve to work together for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples. They committed to a plan of action by adopting, at the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, the outcome document of the High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals (resolution 65/1), which included — among many other issues — references to the development of statistical capacity. In the outcome, the General Assembly: (a) recognized the importance of strengthening statistical capacity to produce adequate, timely, reliable and disaggregated data, including demographic data, in order to design better programmes and policies for sustainable development; (b) committed to strengthening the national statistical systems, including for effectively monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals; (c) reiterated the need to increase efforts in support of statistical capacity-building in developing countries; (d) committed to improving national-level capacity to monitor and report on progress, gaps and opportunities through better generation and use of sex- and age-disaggregated data, including with the support of the international community; and (e) supported the use of national data collection, monitoring and evaluation systems that can track sex-disaggregated access to health-care services and provide rapid feedback for improving the effectiveness and quality of health systems.

2. Over the last five years, similar requests to increase efforts for statistical capacity development have been expressed at the Statistical Commission and the Economic and Social Council, most notably through Council resolution 2006/6. In that resolution, the Council called upon Member States to intensify their efforts to strengthen national statistical capacity in order to produce reliable and timely statistics and indicators for the monitoring of: (a) national development policies and strategies; and (b) the implementation of commitments and the achievement of all development goals at the national, regional and international levels. In the same resolution, the Council called upon the United Nations system, including the Statistics Division and the regional commissions and international agencies, to support national efforts in building and strengthening national statistical capacity, in particular of developing countries.

3. Outside of the context of the United Nations, reference should be made to the Dakar Declaration on the Development of Statistics, which was adopted in Dakar in November 2009 during the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS21) Consortium meeting on the occasion of its 10-year anniversary. In the Declaration, participants called on all partners to take action during the period 2010-2014 and to move the focus of attention from preparing strategic plans for the development of statistics to implementing them with sustainable funding and technical capacity. More information on the issue can be found in a separate report brought before the Commission by the PARIS21 secretariat for information under agenda item 3 (I) (E/CN.3/2011/19).

4. Starting from 2005-2006, the Statistics Division has steadily increased its efforts to strengthen statistical capacity in developing countries as a response to the request for action first made by the Economic and Social Council and now reinforced by the General Assembly. The present report describes the Division's

approach to statistical capacity-building, its increase in efforts over the period 2006-2010, the various capacity-building projects executed and the programme for the period 2011-2013.

## **II. Capacity development approach of the Statistics Division**

5. The Statistics Division's capacity development programme aims at strengthening the national statistical systems by improving the quality and relevance of the statistical production process, including institutional organization and management. To meet the overall objective of the programme, the Division provides advisory services, implements workshops, seminars and conferences, organizes study visits, arranges fellowships and hosts interns and fellows, and maintains knowledge hubs and toolkits in a number of statistical areas. In addition, the Division's activities in the collection of statistical data and maintenance of international databases in various statistical domains need to be seen within the context of capacity-building as these activities inform national statistical offices about the data requirements and the overall ability of countries to provide such information. Whatever the activity may be, it is the aim of the Division to deliver a high-quality product, appropriate for the objective and with noticeable impact.

6. All the activities organized by the Statistics Division aim to transfer — in one way or another — professional knowledge and skills to national statisticians. The activities are conducted by experts in the specific statistical field and are geared towards the needs of a specialized audience. In most instances, experts of the Division conduct the training activity and are often assisted by experts of national statistical offices or international agencies. The experts of the Division are regular staff members, interregional advisers or consultants. To guarantee the consistent high quality of training or advice, the performance of the trainers is evaluated regularly either by the participants of the training workshops or seminars, by a receiving national statistical institute or by the Division itself in case of the temporarily hired consultants.

7. The precise measurement of the impact and effectiveness of statistical capacity-building activities is a complex, and in many cases a challenging task. For instance, the effect of training workshops or study visits may not be immediately visible in the changes to the work routines in the statistical office, though they may have a lasting impact on professional development. However, other activities such as missions by experts to a statistical office to assist in the implementation of specific programme elements usually have a very direct impact. If the expert is from a country of the region, this not only helps to solve the immediate problem, but also fosters more lasting South-South cooperation.

8. The Statistics Division organizes fellowships for statisticians of developing countries to work at its office. After a selection process involving both the originating statistical office and the Division, these fellows join it or another international organization, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, for a period of three to six months to receive hands-on training in a specific statistical domain. The expectation is that, after the end of the fellowships, these statisticians bring their experience and acquired skills and knowledge back home to their office and transfer that knowledge to their colleagues.

9. The most common statistical capacity-building activities delivered by the Statistics Division are the training workshops and the study visits. Over the years, the Division has organized many regional training workshops in different areas of statistics, and sponsored the participation of statisticians from national statistical offices to events organized by other organizations or institutes. These activities have proven to be useful in transferring knowledge to the participants and in establishing networks among statisticians of the region for exchanges of experiences over time. Moreover, the regional training workshops strengthen cooperation between the Division and the national offices by improving communication and the exchange of data as well.

10. Training workshops at the national level have certain advantages over the regional workshops, as by definition they involve many more staff of the trained national statistical office and the outcome of the national training will be more closely linked to the daily work routines in the office. In an effort to carry out the most effective transfer of knowledge, the Statistics Division implements a balanced programme of national, regional and interregional training workshops.

### III. Increase in statistical capacity-building efforts over the period 2006-2010

11. In the period 2006-2010, the Statistics Division organized 164 workshops, expert group meetings and seminars at which a total of 7,937 professionals exchanged experience and received training. Table 1 shows that the number of events increased each year and participants who were trained by the Division increased steadily from 1,343 in 2006 to 1,864 in 2009. The number of statisticians from developing countries who were sponsored by the Division to participate in study visits stayed relatively stable at approximately 140 per year, with a peak of 185 in 2007.

Table 1  
Number of events and participants by year

Year	Workshops <sup>a</sup>		Study visits	
	Number of events	Participants	Number of events	Participants
2006	25	1 343	17	144
2007	35	1 733	22	185
2008	29	1 465	19	109
2009	36	1 864	21	141
2010	39	1 532 <sup>b</sup>	18	147
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>7 937</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>726</b>

<sup>a</sup> Including organized workshops, expert group meetings and seminars.

<sup>b</sup> Data for 2010 participants are preliminary.

12. The total number of all workshops (national and regional), expert group meetings and seminars organized by the Statistics Division went up from 25 in 2006 to 39 events in 2010, reaching on average more than three technical meetings every

month. The breakdown of the events presented in three broad categories, namely (a) economic, trade and environment statistics, (b) population and housing censuses, and (c) Millennium Development Goal indicators, gender statistics and data management and dissemination, is shown in table 2.

Table 2  
Number of workshops, expert group meetings and seminars by theme

Year	<i>Economic, trade and environment statistics</i>	<i>Population and housing censuses</i>	<i>Millennium Development Goal indicators, gender statistics, data management and dissemination</i>
2006	9	5	11
2007	18	7	10
2008	13	8	8
2009	17	8	11
2010	15	11	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>53</b>

13. Each workshop or meeting executed by the Statistics Division is evaluated by its participants immediately upon conclusion of the event and again four months after it. The feedback received over the last years has been consistently positive. On a scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent), the overall value of the workshops and other events conducted in 2008, 2009 and 2010 scored an average of 4.2 for 2008 and 4.3 for both 2009 and 2010, implying that the participants found the meetings certainly valuable. The results of the four-month evaluations in 2008 and 2009 showed that 90 per cent of participants had used the workshop materials in their daily work; approximately 70 per cent stated that they had implemented at least one of the recommendations made at the meeting; importantly, approximately 60 per cent stated that they had trained other staff in their offices; and slightly more than 60 per cent stated that they were still in touch with other meeting participants. The last finding is particularly noteworthy as the multiplier and cooperation effects are important for achieving the objective of sustaining statistical capacity. Some details of the four-month follow-up questionnaire are given in table 3.

Table 3  
Workshop evaluation: four-month follow-up questionnaire

	<i>Responses in the affirmative (percentage)</i>	
	2008	2009
Have you used the material that you received at the workshop?	87.6	92.8
Have you implemented any of the recommendations made at the workshop?	73.1	66.7
Have you trained other staff on the workshop subject?	60.0	58.8
Have you been in contact with other workshop participants?	64.8	62.1
Have you been satisfied with the Division's follow-up?	88.3	89.5

## IV. Statistical capacity-building activities

### A. Millennium Development Goal indicators

14. The Statistics Division currently executes a multi-year capacity-building programme to improve the collation, availability and dissemination of data for monitoring of the Millennium Development Goal indicators, especially at the national level. After a successful pilot phase in 2008 and 2009, the project is starting its main phase in 2010 in Asia and Africa. The project will produce Millennium Development Goal data portals at the national level, bringing together the necessary data from the various responsible national institutes. Those data will subsequently be transmitted to the UNdata<sup>1</sup> portal maintained by the Statistics Division in New York.

15. As a follow-up to the decisions of the Statistical Commission at its recent sessions, the Statistics Division organized workshops in various regions of the world to specifically discuss with countries the discrepancies between national and international data series for the Millennium Development Goal indicators. In 2008, a workshop of this kind was organized in Kampala for African countries; in 2009, two more events were organized in Bangkok for Asian countries and in Beirut for countries of the Middle East. Most recently, in November 2010, another workshop on the Millennium Development Goals was organized in Geneva for countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States region. Two more workshops are planned in Costa Rica for Latin American countries and in Cairo for countries of the Middle East and Northern Africa. The workshops bring together representatives from national statistical offices and line ministries to review recommendations for reporting of data on the Millennium Development Goals and to establish strategies for dealing with data discrepancies and data gaps at the national and international levels. More information on the development indicators can be found in a separate report brought before the Commission under agenda item 3 (i) (E/CN.3/2011/13).

### B. Population and housing censuses

16. Since 2006, the Statistics Division executes a capacity-building programme to support the 2010 round of population and housing censuses. Within the overall objective, the focus of the programme shifted from year to year following the major phases in a census operation. In 2006, the revised set of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*<sup>2</sup> was finalized; and an online resource centre was developed to provide direct technical and methodological assistance to census takers. The theme in 2007 was on census cartography and the use of new technologies such as the Geographical Information Systems and the Global Positioning System. These techniques are crucial for efficient preparation of census maps. In 2008, the main focus was on census data processing (data capture and editing) and especially the use of optical technologies. In 2009, the focus shifted to census evaluation and the post enumeration survey and, in 2010, to data

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see <http://data.un.org/Host.aspx?Content=About>.

<sup>2</sup> *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2*, Statistical Papers, No. 67/Rev. 2 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.XVII.8).

analysis and dissemination involving, among others, the promotion of the CensusInfo, a data-dissemination platform.

17. In the period 2006-2010, the Statistics Division conducted 33 workshops (25 regional and 8 national) and 6 expert group meetings, on census-related topics. The goal of the workshops was to help countries in a targeted way with advice for their population and housing censuses at each major stage of the census operation. In addition, the Division has published several technical reports, which supplement the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, for use by countries in planning and conducting their censuses. The Division also provided or sponsored direct technical assistance to several developing countries for strengthening national capacity on specific aspects of census-taking. The website of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme continues to serve as a valuable source of information on census methodology, census-related activities across the world and the progress of implementation of the 2010 round of censuses. More information on the topic of population and housing censuses is provided in a separate Commission report under agenda item 4 (a) (E/CN.3/2011/21).

### C. Gender statistics

18. The Statistics Division has been active in the field of gender statistics in recent years. In compliance with the mandate, it prepared in 2010 the flagship publication, *The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*.<sup>3</sup> The report addresses critical aspects of life: population, families, health, education, work, power and decision-making, violence against women, environment and poverty. It finds that progress in ensuring the equal status of women and men has been made in many areas, including school enrolment, health and economic participation. At the same time, it makes clear that much more needs to be done, in particular to close the gender gap in public life.

19. The Statistics Division has organized three global forums on gender statistics (Rome in 2007, Accra in 2009 and Manila in 2010). The objective of the forum is to promote the advancement of quality gender statistics among decision makers and other stakeholders. The focus of the most recent forum in Manila was on health statistics. In conjunction with the forum, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics also met in Manila to discuss the further development of a global database for gender statistics, training courses and best practices of related statistical legislation.

20. In addition, the Division has executed a statistical capacity-building programme for gender statistics over the period 2008-2010, which supported the development of gender statistics through (a) strengthening the capacity of developing countries in producing sex-disaggregated data on employment in the informal sector and informal employment; (b) by furthering the work on measuring of violence against women; (c) supporting a wide dissemination of gender statistics; and (d) highlighting the need for gender statistics in the monitoring of progress towards the attainment of gender equity goals and targets, including the Millennium Development Goals. More information on the forum and the Inter-Agency and

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.XVII.11.

Expert Group is available in separate Commission reports on gender statistics under agenda item 3 (b) (E/CN.3/2011/3 and E/CN.3/2011/5).

#### **D. Economic and trade statistics**

21. During the period 2006-2010, the Statistical Commission adopted the revised macroeconomic accounting standard in the form of the System of National Accounts, 2008 (2008 SNA) and new or revised international recommendations for several specific areas of economic statistics, namely the *International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, Revision 4* (2006), the *Central Product Classification, Version 2* (2006), industrial statistics (2008), tourism statistics (2008), distributive trade statistics (2008), index of industrial production (2010), international merchandise trade statistics (2010) and statistics of international trade in services (2010). The Commission encouraged member States to implement these revised recommendations, which necessitated renewed efforts of statistical capacity-building in economic and trade statistics to help countries to implement them. The Statistics Division responded by initiating implementation programmes, by conducting training workshops and by developing compilation guidance. Moreover, the Division maintains comprehensive knowledge bases on economic and trade statistics.

22. As shown in table 2 above, a consistently high number of training workshops were organized in economic statistics for the years 2007 to 2010. In 2010 alone, training workshops were conducted on the revised International Standard Industrial Classification and the Central Product Classification, regional national accounts, industry statistics, tourism statistics, international merchandise trade statistics, short-term economic indicators, and on statistics of international trade in services. In addition, three seminars were organized to discuss the implementation programme of the 2008 SNA at a regional level.

23. In particular for trade statistics, the Division consistently supported developing countries in strengthening their capacity to produce high-quality trade data by organizing and conducting itself regional training workshops on the international merchandise trade statistics or the statistics of international trade in services, or by substantively supporting partner organizations in those efforts. The first in a new series of regional workshops on the implementation of the revised recommendations for the international merchandise trade statistics was held in November 2010 in Lusaka, for sub-Saharan Africa. More workshops will follow in Asia, for the Commonwealth of Independent States region and elsewhere. The Division transfers knowledge also by providing compilation guides which are being prepared for the international merchandise trade statistics, the statistics of international trade in services and the compilation of external trade indices. Moreover, the Division directly assisted countries through advisory services on trade statistics. In addition, the Division provided technical assistance in the related area of tourism statistics. A separate Commission report on tourism statistics is presented for information under agenda item 4 (f) (E/CN.3/2011/26).

24. The Division will organize a global forum on trade statistics at the beginning of February 2011 in Geneva for statisticians of trade in goods and services. Policymakers and trade analysts will be invited to the forum to express their need for trade data in relation to relevant trade issues, for instance regarding trade and



economic development, or trade and employment. The national trade statisticians will interact with the users and establish a closer link between trade and enterprise statistics.

## **E. Environment and energy statistics**

25. During the last five years, capacity-building in environment statistics focused on selected regions and subregions with a view to providing sustained capacity-building and developing synergies with other activities in this area.

26. A list of environmental indicators was developed and adopted for the Economic Commission for Africa region and, based on that list, an adapted list of indicators was developed and adopted for the countries members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Through a series of workshops, methodological guidance has been prepared for the compilation of those indicators. This work was carried out in close collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme. As a follow-up to a development account project led by the Statistics Division, the ECOWAS secretariat took over the project and, with continued support from the Division, organized several country assistance visits by consultants to facilitate capacity-building in the ECOWAS countries. Similar work has been carried out for the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia countries (in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Europe and Eurostat) and for the Caribbean Community member countries. The Division also supported a number of country initiatives to establish environment statistics programmes and develop environment statistics compendiums.

27. The Statistics Division is currently working on the revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics and on the establishment of a core set of environment statistics, to be finalized and adopted by the Statistical Commission in 2012. This work is carried out in collaboration with an expert group formed by country experts, international organizations, academia and non-governmental organizations and is based on new developments in environmental science and policy. The adoption of these recommendations will lead to a plan of implementation that will further strengthen capacities in the development of environment statistics.

28. In the area of environmental accounting, the Statistical Commission adopted the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water (SEEA-Water) as an international interim standard (2007) and the International Recommendations for Water Statistics (2010). The Statistics Division has undertaken a range of activities to strengthen statistical capacity of countries in the implementation of the SEEA-Water and also is in the process of developing compilation guidance and training materials to further assist implementation of SEEA-Water and the International Recommendations for Water Statistics.

29. The Statistics Division organized in 2008 an international workshop on energy statistics (December 2008, Aguascalientes, Mexico) to focus on the user needs and data-collection capabilities, especially of the developing countries. The workshop discussed issues in the collection, compilation and dissemination of energy statistics and provided inputs in the preparation of the International Recommendations for Energy Statistics. The work carried out by the Division for the international

recommendations' development process is provided in a separate Commission report under agenda item 3 (e) (E/CN.3/2011/8).

## **F. Data management and dissemination**

30. During the same period, the Division increased its capacity-building activities regarding data management and dissemination. Workshops were held on the development and maintenance of knowledge bases and web publishing, and on the issues of capturing data, analysis and access to microdata, data archiving, and maintenance of websites.

31. At the end of 2010, the Statistics Division started a new Development Account project, which has as its overall goal strengthening statistical capacity in developing countries to enable them to effectively disseminate and communicate their data. The project will enhance the national statistical systems' capacity, tools and infrastructure, which in turn will improve accessibility by the users, especially policy decision makers and researchers, of timely and reliable statistics that are policy-relevant and meet the increasing demand for high-quality information at the national, regional and international levels. The core activities of the project will consist of studies of best practices in data dissemination and communication, developing training materials, an expert group meeting to validate the training material, and direct technical assistance to selected countries, enabling them to disseminate data and metadata on the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals, both on their own websites as well as through the United Nations data portal.

## **G. Geospatial information**

32. The Statistics Division is also increasingly providing capacity-building support to member States in the area of geospatial information. The activities in support of census cartography have already been mentioned in section IV.B above. Furthermore, the Division, in its capacity as the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, has been funding fellowships to enable representatives, in particular from Africa, to participate in regional workshops on toponymy most recently in Cameroon, Burkina Faso and Kenya. The Division has also supported the activities of the Permanent Committee on Spatial Data Infrastructure for the Americas, enabling the group to meet and to promote its key objective, namely to establish and develop national geospatial data infrastructures of each country in the Americas.

33. The newly launched initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management endorsed by the Commission in 2009 has a strong capacity-building component. The draft terms of reference for the proposed expert committee include explicit tasks "to compile and disseminate best practices of national, regional and international bodies dealing with legal instruments, management models and technical standards for the building of spatial data information ... and facilitate the dissemination of these practices" as well as "to provide a platform to develop effective strategies on how to build and strengthen capacity for the management of geospatial information, especially in developing countries (see also document E/CN.3/2011/34). The Division expects to fund through trust fund arrangements the participation of a

number of developing countries in the forthcoming first United Nations Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management, to be held in Seoul, from 25 to 28 October 2011.

## **H. Development of national statistical systems**

34. The Statistics Division continues to provide strong support to countries on the management aspects of the national statistical system, including matters concerning statistical laws, organizational structure, deployment of staff and resources, and other organizational issues. It has done so through individual missions as well as national and regional workshops, such as the successfully organized events in 2006 in Angola for the countries of the Southern African Development Community and in 2008 in Sri Lanka for the South Asian countries, and through advisory missions. The Division will continue doing so with the help of the recently recruited interregional adviser for the development of national statistical systems.

## **V. Building support for future programme plans**

35. The Statistics Division's programme for the coming years will maintain the same thrusts as in the previous years. The requests for statistical capacity-building are more pertinent than ever, especially in the areas of gender statistics, economic statistics, environment statistics and the utilization of census data. However, funding remains an issue.<sup>4</sup> The Division is grateful to China, Italy, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the World Bank, and other partners for their support of its capacity-building programmes. We look forward to stronger support from other development partners.

36. The Division welcomes national initiatives to engage in capacity development activities for their own staff as well as statisticians from other countries, creating, thus, de facto subregional and regional training centres. These efforts supplement the programmes currently offered by established training institutes such as the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific or the regional centres of international agencies. In that regard, the recent establishment of the China International Statistical Training Centre, in collaboration with the United Nations statistical programme, is very much welcomed. Training centres in Indonesia, Mexico and the Republic of Korea also have established programmes which offer capacity development activities.

## **VI. Conclusions and way forward**

**37. The Commission may wish to take note of the work done by the Statistics Division on statistical capacity-building over the period 2006-2010 in response to the recommendations contained in Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6 and in view of the recent request by the General Assembly to strengthen statistical capacity.**

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<sup>4</sup> For the Division's funding mechanisms of capacity-building activities, see E/CN.3/2005/17.

**38. The Commission may wish to give guidance on the following issues:**

**(a) The approach adopted by the Division focusing on knowledge transfer and development of professional competence and its effectiveness;**

**(b) The need for greater resources by the Division in order to expand its programmes.**

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