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Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics

Background document
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Latin American conference on the transformative agenda for official statistics

Prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

LATIN AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

I. Preamble to the Latin American Conference

The Latin American conference on the Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was held on September 14 to 16, at ECLAC's Headquarters, in Santiago (Chile).

The importance of this initiative at regional level builds on the outcome of the results of the Global Conference on the Transformative Agenda held in January 2015, in New York, as well as on the recognition made by the Statistical Commission, that there is a need to strengthen the coordination of work streams between the global and regional levels.

On the regional side, the Statistical Conference of the Americas (SCA), a subsidiary body of ECLAC, has recognized in its Strategic Plan 2015-2025 that the Latin America and the Caribbean region has made significant progress on the economic, social and, to a lesser extent, environmental fronts in the past two decades. This progress has led to new demands for statistical information, in terms of coverage, higher levels of disaggregation and need for data and indicators for emerging issues and for substantial improvements of quality and timeliness of statistics information. Countries in the region have taken steps to modernize and strengthen their national statistical systems, each at its own pace and to different extents, but the changes made have not always been sufficient to meet the demands for statistical information, resulting in significant gaps.

New existing demands will be made of official statistics with respect to monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda represents a vision of development that reflects national priorities and, therefore, many of the challenges associated with the development of good-quality official statistics in the region will arise from the need for data and indicators to monitor that agenda, requiring a steady flow of good-quality, up-to-date, reliable and accessible data for the ongoing measurement of the indicators of progress towards the new goals and targets at the national, regional and global levels. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development, therefore poses a tremendous challenge even for the most advanced statistical systems.

This changing environment requires a statistical agenda that can mainstream modernization of statistical production processes through a more integrated systems approach. In this context, it was proposed to have two back to back Conferences on the Transformative Agenda in the region, the first for the English speaking countries in the Caribbean area, which took place in Barbados during 7-9 September 2016; the second one for the Spanish speaking countries in Latin America. The present document focuses on the outcome of this second conference.

The Latin American conference was organized as high level forum for senior managers of statistics offices. The specific goals of the Regional Conference, jointly organized by ECLAC, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), and the Inter American Development Bank (IDB) with the support of CARICOM and Eurostat, were the following: a) to raise awareness and share information about transformative initiatives at the national, regional and global levels; b) to set priorities for actions for the five thematic areas identified by the Global Conference and consider additional thematic areas; and c) to reflect on existing and new coordination mechanisms and to consider needs for capacity building.

The Conference was organized in four substantive sessions covering the 5 thematic areas of the Transformative Agenda. During the discussions, it was evident that there are some issues, common to all of the strategic areas; such issues generated actions called cross-cutting actions, which include, among others, pushing for the initiatives for Big Data, cloud computing and any innovative technology to comply with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and Guidelines of Good Practice. The conclusions of every strategic area are detailed in the following section.

II. Overview of Strategic Plan

Strategic Area 1 & 2: Coordination at and between global, regional and national statistical systems, communication and advocacy

Monitoring the commitments of the SDG will require a steady flow of good-quality, up-to-date, reliable and accessible data for the ongoing measurement of the indicators of progress towards the new goals and targets at the national, regional and global levels. The 2030 Agenda therefore poses a tremendous challenge even for the most advanced statistical systems in terms of coordination and cooperation, as well as the need for improving the ongoing communication and advocacy strategies.

In recognition of such challenges, the SCA Strategic Plan 2015-2025 establishes as the first strategic goal, to strengthen the organization and management practices of the national statistics offices and the integration and coordination of national statistics systems.

The countries of the region are working to foster coordination and cooperation between the member countries of the SCA and sub-regional and international organizations.

In terms of advocacy, the countries have shown concern about the need to broaden statistical culture and encourage the use of existing data to help strengthen national statistical systems and support evidence-based decision-making in public policies.

The directors or chiefs of the national statistics offices and the high-level authorities of the public institutions that attended the Conference raised the following points:

- Seek the high-level political endorsement and commitment, an essential requirement for bringing about the economical and human resources to strengthen institutionalization of the National Statistics Offices and its leadership role in the SDG and the Transformative Agenda.
- Increase the inter-institutional coordination to the national and regional levels by:
 - Establishing the complementary responsibilities for all the players for the transformation and modernization of the official statistics.

- Clarifying the shared objectives within the National Statistics Systems.
- Strengthen and adapt the legal framework within which the NSS operates.
- Obtain a high-level commitment so that the ministries monitoring the SDG would actively bring the NSOs as statistics' regulatory entities and to have the indicators based on official statistics.
- Strengthen the communication and advocacy programmes and activities within countries and across the region and build on existing advocacy initiatives on the value of official statistics to enable the transformation and modernization of statistics (national Statistics Day, user-producer dialogues with policy-makers, legislators, the media, the general public, and etcetera).
- Make an inventory of the initiatives for cooperation among the countries, agencies and statistics offices in the region in order to know the concurrent projects and generate synergy.
- Develop mechanisms to facilitate the coordination to the regional level in collaboration with the global level.
- Build cooperation among the data communities, users and other stakeholders to ensure the harmonization of the methodologies, enhancing efficiency and avoid duplications.
- Strengthen the measures for the implementation of the good practices and legal frameworks covering from methodological and technical cooperation to managerial topics.
- Facilitate the long term planning of the statistical production, beyond political periods.
- Strengthen the actions promoted by the Network of Knowledge Transmission working group of the SCA for sharing learned lessons.
- Concentrate efforts on a complementary subset of SDG with regional relevance.

Strategic Area 3: Integrated statistical systems for data collection, processing and dissemination

As established on the SCA Strategic Plan, it is one of the goals of the countries in the region to promote the dissemination and implementation of international standards and best practices for the management of national statistical offices.

It has also been stressed that there is a need for promoting greater effectiveness and efficiency in the processes of production and dissemination of statistics through the use of new data sources and modernization of the production function, especially by taking advantage of administrative records for statistics purposes and the opportunities offered by the data revolution.

The key actions related to this strategic area focused on issuing guidelines and standards on the integration of statistical systems, as well as promoting the integration of the administrative registers in the countries of the region. Other key actions should include:

- Work on the building of better metadata catalogues and the use of administrative data sources.
- Make a strategic and medium-term plan for the statistical development.
- Strengthen and encourage the international support to the programs for data processing.
- Develop a national and regional communication strategy , using the existent initiatives for the promotion of the value added by the official statistics to support evidence-based policy and decision making processes
- Develop and implement educational programmes to increase data literacy, provide statistical services for the use statistics by the different communities of users and empower institutions and individuals to use statistics effectively in their own decisions.
- Undertake assessments, mapping and streamlining of statistical production processes aimed at improving efficiency and effectiveness.

Strategic Area 4: Innovation and modernization through standard-based statistical business architecture

It has been agreed, that significant progress has been made on institution-building and the integration of national statistical systems. Nevertheless, some statistical bodies still carry out their functions in a precarious institutional framework with outdated laws that fail to reflect current realities and needs relating to the production and dissemination of statistics.

A central challenge for statistical offices is to transform their processes to embrace a new production model that allows for access to new technologies and the exploitation of new data sources, achieving institutionally robust and sustainable national statistical systems with appropriate governance mechanisms for official and unofficial statistics.

The following key actions were considered for this strategic area:

- Assess the regional public goods to make a plan for a modular transformation of the statistical production process in the NSOs, given the heterogeneity of the countries' statistical capacity.
- The new institutional architecture should give priority to monitoring the SDG and to respond to the needs for better data within the countries.
- Position the NSOs as the governing bodies of the geospatial information to avoid duplicities with other national agencies.
- Sharing and reusing tools and innovative technologies within and across the national and regional statistical systems, including the adaptation of existing processes for producing statistical information in to support the SDG.
- Promote the standardization of production processes through the application of the Commons Statistical Production Architecture (CSPA).
- Sharing operation manuals and documentation that include practical implications on the implementation of technologies, for example, the recruitment and selection process of specialized personnel on the field of information technologies.

- Take advantage of economies of scale for the acquisition of computer equipment and mobile devices for the assisting with survey/censuses, reusing them among the countries.
- Make an inventory of the innovative technology projects in the field of statistical operations in the region and promote its reutilization, as the use of open source software.
- Implement a regional data network, and explore the best practices on cloud computing in support to the generation of official statistics and research.
- Create an Innovation Unit within the NSOs to follow up on the Transformative Agenda.

Strategic Area 5: Training and capacity building

It has been stated that many offices are understaffed and have a high turnover of highly qualified personnel. They therefore lack a steady pool of professional and technical staff that can work towards improving the quality of official statistics. This results in a weakening of technical capacity in some critical areas for statistical offices in the region, including in particular demography, sample design and statistical analysis.

For that reason, to foster the development of technical and methodological capacities for generating high-quality statistical information has been defined as one of the strategic goals for the development of the statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean. A key action identified in this area is the creation of a Latin American Statistical Research and Training Institute, and the promotion of initiatives for e-learning at the regional level. Other actions defined during the Conference were the followings.

- Include topics on administration of change and change management in the initiatives for training and capacity building, continue the cooperation related to transferring learned lessons, and include multidisciplinary teams in the initiatives for capacity building.
- Provide training to the users of statistical products and complement the regional inventory of statistical capacity.

- Make public the challenges faced by the statistical community to generate greater support and generate synergies.
- Identify and coordinate domestic and external resources to strategically address the capacity needs, identify resource gaps and to set priorities.