

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.3/183
14 April 1954

Original: ENGLISH

Dual Distribution

STATISTICAL COMMISSION

Eighth Session

PRIORITIES OF THE COMMISSION PROGRAMME

(Memorandum prepared by the Secretary-General)

1. The attention of the Statistical Commission is drawn to resolution 497 C (XVI) of the Economic and Social Council which requests functional and regional commissions to review their programmes for 1955 in the light of Council resolutions 324 (XI), 402 B (XIII) and 451 A (XIV), and to include in their reports an account of the progress made in concentrating their efforts on projects of high priority.
2. The Commission will recall that it has made a review of priorities during previous sessions in the light of then existing resolutions of the Council and rules of procedure. Resolution 402 B (XIII), which was adopted subsequent to the sixth session of the Commission, established procedures which are recommended in connexion with the establishment of priorities. These are as follows:
 - (a) The Secretary-General should report to each commission session the action which he has taken to carry out the commission's programmes according to the priorities previously established, and submit suggestions of priorities for future work, including suggestions regarding projects which might be deferred or eliminated;
 - (b) The programme of work of each commission should be divided into broad subjects, a differentiation being made, where practicable, between those of higher and lower priority;

(c) The broad subjects should be sub-divided into three groups, the first group consisting of continuing projects of high priority, the second group of ad hoc projects also of high priority, and the third group of projects of lower priority, which might be deferred or eliminated, or undertaken only in so far as resources permitted;

(d) It is not necessary to indicate the relative importance of individual projects in the first and second groups, respectively mentioned in (c); but, within the group of subjects of lower priority, individual projects should be listed, if possible, in their order of priority, or some indication of priority should be given;

(e) In the case of ad hoc projects, there should be an indication of probable duration;

(f) The Secretary-General, within his existing authority, should have discretion as to the scheduling of work in order that the best use may be made of existing staff and resources and to take account of unforeseen circumstances which may arise.

3. Resolution 451 (XIV) lists six major United Nations priority programmes upon which efforts should be further concentrated. This list was not intended to refer to "methods and techniques" - such as statistics - "which are essential in the implementation of most of these programmes."

4. Document E/CN.3/170 entitled "Review of International Statistics" and other documentation before the Commission set out in detail the action taken by the Secretary-General to carry out the programme with the priorities previously established by the Statistical Commission. The document sets out the main fields of activity, describes the work done and suggests the remaining problems. It provides a general background against which the Commission may select for emphasis those areas of activity which are most important and it indicates the points of inter-connection between fields at which collaboration between the United Nations and the specialized agencies is required.

In pursuing its work programme the Commission pays particular attention to the need for co-ordination with the work being carried on by the international agencies in the development and application of statistical standards. The fact that primary responsibility for statistics is divided among a number of agencies

makes it all the more necessary for the Commission to assure itself that the programmes of the different agencies are complementary and interlocking so that, taken together, they constitute a consistent whole. During the eighth session, the work of the Commission was particularly aided by the participation of representatives of the specialized agencies. This was especially true in connection with the formulation of the work programmes on social statistics and on the measurement of levels of living, both of these fields requiring the effective integration of activities. A general plan of procedure was evolved for work in these fields with the expectation that the Commission would be able to have before it at its next session a co-ordinated report on progress.

5. A considerable part of the total work load of the Statistical Office is composed of operating responsibilities in preparing the several publications of the Office and in carrying out the functions of a general central statistical secretariat for the United Nations. The statistical publications include the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics (and its supplement), the Demographic Yearbook, the Statistical Yearbook, the International Trade Yearbook, Population and Vital Statistics Reports (quarterly), Statistics of National Income and Expenditure (semi-annually), Commodity Trade Statistics (quarterly), the Direction of International Trade (monthly in co-operation with the Fund and the Bank) and various special statistical studies produced in connection with other projects. The central statistical functions comprise the preparation of statistics for the publication and for the analytical use of other divisions of the Secretariat and of specialized agencies, services for the General Assembly Committee on Contributions and services for other committees and organs of the United Nations.

6. Other activities of the Office relate more particularly to studies recommended by the Statistical Commission designated to formulate statistical standards for international use and to assist in their adoption in countries seeking to improve their national statistical systems. It should be noted, however, that a very close relationship exists between much of the regular work of the Office, and special undertakings that have been recommended by the Commission and other organs. The regular collection, appraisal and publication of official statistics in a particular field is very closely connected with the development of recommendations regarding uniform standards in that field and with facilitating their adoption.

7. The following paragraphs contain the proposals of the Secretary-General, based on the discussions of the Commission at its eighth session, about the priorities which might be accorded to the various projects which the Commission has reviewed.

8. Continuing projects of high priority

The Statistical Commission at various sessions has reviewed the different fields of statistics and has designated those fields it considered most important for immediate work towards the development of standards. A number of these tasks have been completed in the sense that recommendations have been made and approved. In some cases, however, continuing work is necessary to secure the adoption of the standards, to advise countries on methods of implementation, to prepare manuals and to make provision for such revisions and extensions as may require the Commission's subsequent consideration. In some cases, but not in all, the amount of this continuing work is as great as that required to elaborate the standards in the first instance, and it is considered very important to maintain continued activity in the application to national statistics of standards that have been recommended for general use. It is therefore considered that this type of work should be assigned to the first priority group, as follows:

- (1) The International Standard Industrial Classification (particularly assistance in implementation).
- (2) The Standard International Trade Classification (assistance to countries using the Classification to ensure uniform application and interpretation; collection, compilation and presentation of international statistics based on the Classification).
- (3) Advice and assistance in the application of standards for:
 - (a) population censuses
 - (b) vital statistics
 - (c) migration statistics
 - (d) basic industrial statistics
 - (e) index numbers of industrial production
 - (f) external trade statistics
 - (g) transport statistics
 - (h) national accounts
 - (i) capital formation statistics
 - (j) questions of methodology including sampling.

9. Ad hoc projects also of high priority

- (1) Compilation of an index for the International Standard Industrial Classification.
- (2) Examination and appraisal of definitions and methods used in the 1950-1951 population censuses, including a study of tabulation plans and methods, with a view to preparing tentative recommendations and descriptive materials for the 1960 round of censuses.
- (3) Collection of country comments on and revision of the provisional Item and Alphabetical Indexes for the Standard International Trade Classification (2 years); study of national practices in the matter of valuation of commodities in external trade (1 year); study of coverage of imports, exports, re-exports and transit trade and of definitions of countries of provenance of imports (2 years); revision and publication of official definitions of customs areas (1 year).
- (4) Industrial statistics including statistics of enterprises and recommendations for tabulation of data (2 years).
- (5) Wholesale prices and index-numbers thereof (2 years).
- (6) Price and quantity indexes.
- (7) Statistics of distribution including censuses (2 years).
- (8) Quantum and unit value (price) indexes in external trade.
- (9) Statistics of stocks and consumption (2 years).
- (10) Study of problems of application of the System of National Accounts and Concepts of Capital Formation (1-2 years).
- (11) Compilation of manual on methods of estimating national income, including capital formation and distribution of income (2 years).
- (12) Social statistics; development of methods, particularly relating to social stratification, family and household composition and housing.
- (13) Studies of problems of measurement of components of level of living, especially studies of demographic characteristics, consumption and savings, social conditions.
- (14) Methods and uses of population registers.

10. Projects of lower priority

- (1) Insurance statistics
- (2) Construction statistics
- (3) Methods of improving accuracy
- (4) Road accident statistics
- (5) Iron and steel statistics.