STATISTICAL COMMISSION

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

BASIC STATISTICS FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

(Memorandum prepared by the Secretary-General)

1. At its eighth session, the Statistical Commission considered the question of establishing a list of economic and social statistics which would be useful to countries which wish to expand their statistical programmes. The Commission recognized the difficulties of establishing such a list but felt, nevertheless, that further attention should be given to the drawing up of a list of basic statistical series for use by statistically less advanced countries, since there were situations in which such a list could be of assistance to such countries. The Commission felt that particular importance attached to a list of this kind when it was directed towards the statistical requirements of less industrialized countries engaged in programmes for steady economic and social advancement. The Commission, therefore, requested the Secretary-General to give further attention to this question and to submit a report to the ninth session.

2. In view of the interest of the Statistical Commission, the Secretariat has carried out investigation directed toward the development of a list of statistical series for the use of less industrialized countries. While the progress made to date has been confined to preliminary study of the problems involved, the Secretariat wishes to take advantage of the present session to obtain the Commission's views on the lines along which future work on this subject should proceed. The investigations made to date have been concerned with the various possible kinds of lists of statistics for use in connexion with programmes of development.

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3. Lists of statistics have been investigated that range from figures of an engineering character, through basic indicators with respect to sectors of an economy, to aggregates for the economy as a whole. The first approach gives rise to a long list of detailed statistics, a number of which would be pertinent under specific circumstances only and would not be amenable to mass collection. This is due to the fact that these statistics would be designed to furnish information for planning and carrying out specific projects for development - for example, increasing agricultural yields through changes in methods of sowing and cultivation or through the use of fertilizers. A second kind of list would be one that provides a substantial number of the traditional statistical series for key aspects of economies (e.g., population, labour, industry, external trade), many of which would be of use to less industrialized countries generally and are commonly the product of statistical work. These data would relate to broad economic and social questions that are common to many countries. For example, such statistics would provide information for outlining the structure of farming, determining prospects and targets for the production of key crops and for following trends in production as well as demand and prices for these crops. Though a considerable number of statistical series is involved in this approach, it would be possible to assign broad priorities only to each of the series in terms of the generality with which they are needed. A third approach to a list of basic statistics would produce data for the economy as a whole (e.g., value of capital formation) and sets of national accounts that delineate the interrelationships among its different sectors. These statistics are of general value in programming development, but statistically less advanced countries would have considerable difficulty in estimating them to a usable degree of reliability.

4. Regardless of the choice adopted for the list of basic statistics, it will be necessary for the Secretary-General to consult with the statistical officers of the specialized agencies and other interested bodies, and with the countries of certain regions, particularly those of Asia and the Far East, Latin America and the Middle East. The Statistical Commission may, therefore, wish to request the Secretary-General:
(i) To continue work on the compiling of a basic list of important statistical series for use by statistically less advanced countries, taking account of views expressed in the discussions of the ninth session;

(ii) To consult with the specialized agencies and other interested international organizations on the series with which they are concerned;

(iii) To consult with the statistical authorities of countries that have common development problems with respect to the data that they require and the priorities that they assign.