

Economic and Social Council – Coordination and Management Meeting
Item 18 (c): Economic and environmental questions: Statistics
Introduction of the Chair of the UN Statistical Commission, Ms. Wasmalia Bivar (Brazil)
New York, 7 June 2017

Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council,

Ambassadors, distinguished colleagues,

It is my distinct honor to address you today in my capacity as the chair of the 48th session of the Statistical Commission. Merely a year younger than this distinguished body (the Council), the Statistical Commission celebrated its 70th anniversary this year.

I hope you allow me to reminisce briefly on the Commission's rich history. The Statistical Commission indeed has come a long way since its first session, which was held in early 1947 in a small room at the temporary headquarters of the then new United Nations in Lake Success, NY. Just 10 delegates and 9 observers attended that first Commission session. Only a few weeks ago, in March, we celebrated our 70th anniversary with more than 700 delegates attending the opening session, which was held for the first time in the General Assembly Hall.

For 70 years, the Statistical Commission has worked tirelessly to make data comparable around the world. In the Statistical Commission, government experts from around the world come together as a global community to develop the common language of statistics and to serve the global community with their technical knowledge and expertise. In this pursuit, the Commission has approved numerous standards and classifications to improve the availability and quality of official statistics, for instance in the areas of census taking and national accounts. This spirit of shared ethics and professionalism found its clearest expression in the adoption of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics – first in 1994 by the Statistical Commission and later by this distinguished body in 2013 and subsequently also the General Assembly.

The broad scope of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs calls for an unprecedented amount of data and statistics to fully measure progress across the 17 Goals and 169 targets. It was against this historical context that the Statistical Commission was recently given its biggest challenge when the General Assembly entrusted the Commission with the unprecedented task of developing a global indicator framework for measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the past two years, the Statistical Commission has worked tirelessly to respond to this call. The majority of this work was done through the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators that the Commission had established to do this work and which included 28 senior national indicator specialists representing all subregions of the world.

Distinguished Delegates,

The work of the Commission in this area culminated in the adoption of the global indicator framework at its last session this past March, where it received broad support from members and observers from all regions. The framework's primary purpose is to provide a structure for addressing all aspects of the Goals and targets in the Secretary General's annual progress report on the SDGs at the global level. The proposed framework is now in front of you for adoption, in compliance with the explicit stipulations of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which also foresees passing the resolution to the General Assembly for final adoption

The draft resolution before you consists of more than just the Global indicator framework. It also outlines specific areas of work for the IAEG-SDGs and outlines criteria for further work on refining indicators. Over the coming years the IAEG-SDGs under the leadership of the Statistical Commission will further work to improve the global indicator framework through minor annual refinements and through two comprehensive reviews slated for 2020 and 2025.

Another key component of the draft resolution focuses on the statistical capacity building needs to allow national statistical systems to fully address the 2030 Agenda. [The draft resolution before you calls for strengthening countries' capacity to produce the necessary data. In particular, the UN Statistical Commission's High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination, and Capacity Building developed the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, which was launched at the first UN World Data Forum in Cape Town, South Africa in January this year and endorsed by the Statistical Commission in March. The Plan calls for a commitment by governments, policy leaders, the international community and other relevant stakeholders to undertake key actions for the SDG implementation process. The ambitious aim of the 2030 Agenda to ensure that no one is left behind calls for strengthening and expanding data on all groups of populations, and represents one of the strategic objectives of the Plan.

Distinguished Delegates,

As I outlined above, an unprecedented amount of data is needed to measure progress towards the 2030 Agenda. This means that the Statistical Commission's regular and ongoing work on standards and methodology must continue with increased intensity and commitment. Therefore, you will also find in the Commission's report decisions on such relevant cross-cutting topics as quality assurance, big data, and the integration of statistical and geospatial information. Moreover, you will find decisions upon such important topics as social statistics, national accounts, environmental-economic accounting and the international comparison programme to name only a few.

Distinguished delegates,

Check against delivery

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present the Statistical Commission's report and decisions to you and look forward to your continued and strong support in the Commission's work.

Thank you.
