21 December 2000

STATISTICAL QUALITY SEMINAR 2000
6-8 DECEMBER 2000, JEJU ISLAND, REPUBLIC OF KOREA
(Summary agreed by the participants)

1. The seminar had been organized by the Korean National Statistical Office (KNSO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It took place at the Lotte Hotel, Jeju Island, Republic of Korea, 6-8 December 2000. It was attended by participants from 18 countries from around the world, as well as 7 international organizations. Eleven papers about national and international experiences on statistical quality assessment, management, and promotion were presented, and 10 discussants provided comments that opened the general discussions. (The papers and comments will be available on the seminar website http://www.nso.go.kr/sqs2000/ and also in the form of proceedings to be published after the seminar.)
2. Participants took note of the existing wide variety of frameworks, approaches, objectives, techniques and instruments, having, however, the common objective to promote and monitor quality of statistics within national statistical organizations and at the international level.
3. Appreciation was expressed for the IMF's work on data quality, specifically the Data Quality Reference Site on the Internet and the comprehensive data quality assessment framework. These were viewed as global initiatives to enlighten users on the quality of official statistics and to support countries in their efforts to improve the quality of their statistics. The IMF was encouraged to continue work on the generic and specific assessment frameworks, using the interactive, consultative processes it had applied so far. In particular, the IMF was encouraged to expand the number of specific frameworks, including through cooperation with other international organizations on datasets outside the IMF's core focus.
4. The effort of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) to collect and disseminate examples of good practices relating to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics was welcomed. This effort had been recommended by a work session co-organized by the Singapore Department of Statistics, UNSD, and the IMF in January 1999. These examples, which are soon to be available on a Website, highlight factors that influence the overall environment in which statistical systems function and are therefore directly or indirectly affect statistical quality.
5. As to country practices and experiences, various approaches to promoting and enhancing statistical quality were discussed. These include Total Quality Management (TQM), ISO 9000 and similar techniques, as well as methods for internal quality inspection (or self-assessment) and external assessments, including peer reviews (assessment of the quality of statistical systems, processes, and products by experts from other countries).
6. Some of these approaches focus on statistical processes, some on products, and some on the institutional setting; some encompass more than one of these

perspectives. Some of these approaches focus on an individual data source (e.g., a survey), some on collective products derived from several data sources (e.g., national accounts). Some emphasize providing information to assist users in assessing data quality for their own uses, while others emphasize information to feedback into the process. It was recognized that different quality indicators may have to be used according to the differing approaches and purposes.

7. Despite the differences among the approaches used, it was concluded that an overriding common characteristics of these approaches should be that they take the users' needs as their principal starting point.
8. Equally it was concluded that, no matter whether methodologies were used that were readily available on the market or were self-developed systems, one of the key success factors for all quality initiatives was the commitment of the senior management of statistical offices (including statistical units in ministries, central banks, etc.). In pursuing quality and creating an environment in which quality was a core corporate issue, it was felt that the focus ought to be on initiatives for innovation and stimulating the exchange of expertise and experience, rather than on penalizing mistakes. In other words, management should aim to develop the 'learning organization' and a "culture of quality."
9. It was also concluded that the various approaches used all have their own advantages and disadvantages and that these advantages and disadvantages would have differing weights according to differences in organizational structure (including the difference between centralized and decentralized statistical systems), management styles, main statistical sources (surveys or administrative registers), and levels of statistical development. Thus, the choice of an approach to the management of quality would need to reflect on the differing national situations; in other words, no 'one size fits all.' .
10. Nevertheless, enough common grounds was found to exist that it was felt that more work should be done at the international level in harmonizing terminology and concepts regarding statistical quality. In addition, international organizations should continue playing a role in training activities aiming at improved statistical quality assessment and management, as well as in the development of statistical quality manuals that would systematically document experiences and approaches used at the national and international levels. Finally, it was concluded that the international discussion on statistical quality management ought to be continued. In this regard, the initiative taken by Statistics Sweden and Eurostat to co-host another seminar on the same topics, in May2001, was welcomed, as were the session on Quality Programs in Statistics Agencies at the ISI meeting in August 2001 and the Statistics Canada symposium on Methodological Issues in Quality Management in late 2001.