

Meeting of UN entities on Statistical Programmes
Madrid, 9 September 2007
UN-WTO Offices, 3 - 6 pm

Minutes

Attendance:

1. The meeting was attended by representatives from UNSD, ECE, ESCAP, ESCWA, ECA and UNCTAD, UNIDO, WHO, ILO, FAO, UN-WTO, UNFPA, UNESCO; excused: UNEP, UNDP, UNICEF.

ONE-UN Vision and UN Statistical System:

2. The Director of UNSD welcomed the representatives from the Statistical Programmes of the various UN entities. He explained that given UNSD's general mandate to facilitate coordination of statistical activities in the UN, and specifically in the context of the UN wide call to 'deliver as one', he had convened this meeting to provide an opportunity to discuss how to further strengthen cooperation in the programme area of Statistics, building upon the common institutional framework. He challenged the group to reflect on how to improve and to assert the "UN Statistical System" and raised for instance the question on formulating common positions within the now larger CCSA.
3. The idea of a closer cooperation among the statistical units of the UN system was generally welcomed. There was some discussion as to how the UN system is defined. In general it was stressed that the UN encourages strong cooperation of national statistical units at the country level, and therefore needed to lead through its own example. In this context, it was recognized that UNSD had a special role in leading UN-system wide coordination in Statistics.
4. There were some voices of caution, pointing out that in some areas cooperation in a specific technical field such as Statistics was sometimes limited by specific institutional restrictions - data pricing policies were mentioned as example. Also, successful efficient cooperation was ultimately dependent on a positive cooperative environment at the 'higher level'. With respect to the external context, in which the UN-System is operating, it was stressed that the CCSA was generally a well functioning mechanism, effectively addressing statistical issues that concern all statistical producers. Any improved coordination among the UN-System agencies should not negatively impact upon the working of the CCSA. Also, close cooperation with other players was always needed, especially given the realities of resource allocations.

5. There was general consensus that there was room for improved cooperation among the UN sister agencies in the field of Statistics, especially if handled in a flexible manner. Cooperative efforts were considered most likely to be successful within the context of (i) very specific projects and tasks and (ii) at the country level.
6. The development of common imputed or adjusted values for child mortality was mentioned as one very specific successful cooperative exercise, which could serve as a model. Several other specific areas for joint projects were mentioned e.g., training of own staff to foster a culture of professionalism; IT development; country names and classifications;
7. The second prospective area for improved cooperation is the field of statistical capacity building in developing countries. Many group members considered the philosophy of 'delivery as one' particularly important at the country level. A specific proposal was made to form a taskforce to incorporate a statistical component into the national development strategies, using possibly one of the 7 current pilot projects of UNDG. In this context it was also proposed to create a knowledge database on the statistical situation in a specific country, including information on who is present from the UN agencies and what types of projects are being undertaken.
8. Summarizing the discussion, UNSD announced the creation of a P-4 position in the Director's Office, with responsibilities for system-wide coordination. Consequently, UNSD would develop specific proposals on how to follow up on the issues of training, classifications and country projects. UNSD furthermore called upon all UN partners to submit ideas for joint initiatives.

UN-Data project briefing:

9. UNSD made a presentation of the newly developed UN-Data portal. The project, which was financed by extra-budgetary funds, had as original principal objective to improve public access, use and understanding of UN Statistics Division data. It was anchored upon the improvement or replacement of the UN Common Data Base, which also incorporates key data series from sister agencies. The core activity in the initial project phase was the development of a powerful search mechanism, which makes it possible to find and retrieve data in a variety of decentralized databases. In order to test how the system works with data outside the UN Statistics Division, UNESO, FAO and ILO had agreed to cooperate by providing data sets for a pilot test. As this testing has been successful, it is now suggested to develop the Portal as a single-entry into the data available in the wider UN system. Certain specific functionalities, with respect to the selection, presentation and downloading of specific data series had already been developed.

10. The presentation found great interest and a number of specific questions were raised about certain technical aspects of the system, e.g. the use of SDMX and the various display options. Also one representative requested more information on the project management and documentation about its objectives. Two more general 'data policy' issues were also raised, namely the issue of (i) 'data quality certification' and of (ii) 'regional data'.
11. Several group members asked the question, what criteria the system would use to select or to prioritize data series, whether the objective was, in fact, to show only one UN data item per subject matter area and how quality would be assessed, ensured and communicated to the users. UNSD explained that the system would display multiple data series in parallel if they currently existed in the UN system. Extensive metadata information from the original source should enable the user to make his/her own quality assessments.
12. The need for the inclusion of regional databases, and of regional and sub-regional totals was emphasized. UNSD agreed to review the issue together with the relevant experts from ECE and the pilot agencies.
13. UNSD welcomed the critical comments and reviews and encouraged all agencies to further explore the UN-Data portal. For that purpose, UNSD will communicate the access details to the UN-Data test site and invite all to provide constructive comments. Whilst in this initial phase UNSD will continue to work primarily with the pilot agencies, at a later stage the possibility to organize a wider 'producer conference' to facilitate more group discussion will be explored.
14. Consideration of item 4 of the agenda on "system-wide, cross cutting activities" was postponed to the next meeting of the group.

Future meetings and collaboration:

15. It was agreed to have another meeting during the Statistical Commission week in New York (26-29 February 2008).

Actions:

- UNSD to develop specific proposals on follow up on the issues of training, classifications and country projects.
- ALL to submit ideas for possible joint initiatives.
- UNSD to communicate access to UN-Data test site. ALL to provide comments.
- UNSD to consider UN-Data producer conference at later stage.
- UNSD to schedule meeting of UN agencies in February 2008

Annex 1: Agenda and Documentation

Agenda

1. Introduction (UNSD)
2. 'One-UN Vision' and UN Statistical System (open discussion)
3. UN -Data (project briefing by UNSD)
4. System-wide cross cutting activities: global gender statistical programme, economic statistics, 2010 census round, etc.
5. Future meetings and collaboration

Document:

Handout on the UN-Data presentation "A world of information".