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REPORT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON CO-ORDINATION'S
SUB-COMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The first session of the Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities, which was created by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination at its forty-third session, took place in Rome from 10 to 13 July 1967. The session was attended by the following organizations:

United Nations
International Labour Organisation
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
International Monetary Fund
World Health Organization
General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

2. In view of the importance of the statistical activities carried out in its region by the Inter American Statistical Institute, that organization was invited to participate in the meeting and provide information on its statistical programme.

3. In the light of the discussion at the fourteenth session of the Commission,^{1/} the following summary of the meeting of the Sub-Committee is presented.

Integrated five-year programme of international statistics

4. A report entitled "Integrated five-year programme of international statistics" (E/CN.3/351) was submitted to the fourteenth session of the Commission. The

^{1/} Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 3, paras. 7-18.

Commission felt that this report had facilitated its examination of problems of co-ordination and further expressed the view that similar reports should be presented to future sessions. The Sub-Committee agreed that each agency would prepare a revised version of its own statistical programme and send it to the United Nations.

5. The Sub-Committee recognized that the programmes of the various agencies were determined by the needs and decisions of the individual organizations and thus were conceptually not part of a single international programme. Moreover, none of the organizations, in fact, possessed a definitive programme for more than two years ahead and the projects listed must, therefore, be regarded as tentative and subject to change according to the circumstances in each agency. For this reason, it was decided that the title of the next report should be "Integrated statement of international statistical programmes" (see E/CN.3/373), so as better to reflect its actual content.

6. None the less, the Sub-Committee felt that the presentation of this integrated statement would help in identification of gaps and overlaps and in informing each agency of the plans and intentions of others; it would thus provide a useful guideline for formulating future statistical programmes in a way that would facilitate the task of the users of international statistics.

7. The preparation of this integrated statement also implies that the statistical units of each international agency should have full access to the statistical work and future plans of other divisions in the same organization, since only in this way can the former serve as an effective focal point for international co-ordination.

Co-ordination of world standards

8. The Economic and Social Council, at its forty-second session, having taken note of the part of the report of the Commission at its fourteenth session bearing on the co-ordination of world standards in interrelated fields of statistics,^{2/} requested the Secretary-General, in resolution 1214 (XLII), in consultation with the specialized agencies:

"... to prepare a report for consideration by the proposed inter-agency co-ordinating committee on statistical activities, and thereafter by

^{2/} Ibid., paras. 9-13.

the Statistical Commission at its fifteen session, on the important interrelated fields of statistics for which world standards are desirable and on the practical methods by which the Statistical Commission could review and make recommendations on proposed statistical standards in these interrelated fields prior to their recognition as world standards."

9. The Sub-Committee made a list (see annex) of fields which were clearly interrelated and among which world standards or changes in existing standards might in future be proposed. The Sub-Committee felt that the concurrence of the Commission in the establishment of standards would facilitate their promotion on a world-wide basis. There were many problems involved in establishing practical methods to permit the Commission's review of standards proposed by the specialized agencies. While procedures differed from one agency to another, generally a technical study was undertaken prior to the drafting of proposed standards and the technical problems were usually reviewed by a committee of experts on the subject. Final draft standards were prepared by the agency on the basis of the experts' recommendations and were then submitted for the approval of the technical statistical body of the responsible agency. After completion of this work, the recommended international standard was submitted to the governing body of the responsible agency. Owing to the fact that the Commission meets only biennially, it would often be impossible to secure recommendations of the Commission at that stage on the proposed standard in time for their submission to the governing body of the responsible agency. The Sub-Committee felt, therefore, that it was in the course of the technical work that the advice and recommendations of the Commission could best be sought by keeping it fully informed of all technical developments. Where a standard had, however, been approved by a governing body, the Sub-Committee felt that the recommended standard should be transmitted to the Commission for review as to its applicability in the related fields of statistics.

The growing burden on national statistical offices

10. The Sub-Committee discussed the question of the burden on national statistical offices arising from the work of international organizations. It was noted that considerable progress had been made in the co-ordination of requests for statistical data to countries by the United Nations agencies. The principle has long been established that data supplied to one organization was available to all the United Nations organizations. Problems arising from requests made by international organizations which were not party to the co-ordination arrangements established among the United Nations agencies needed to be examined. The /...

Sub-Committee intends to invite these organizations to participate in its co-ordination work on appropriate subjects, particularly international trade and industrial statistics. In the fields of agriculture, forestry and fishery, effective co-ordination with those organizations had been established at the working level.

Training of statistical personnel

11. The Sub-Committee discussed the training of statistical personnel in the developing countries. Training needs were of two kinds, namely (a) the training of middle-level personnel, such as census supervisors and clerical personnel, and (b) the training of professional statisticians. The Sub-Committee was of the view that the former was largely the responsibility of the national Governments themselves. It recognized, however, that in the present state of development of statistical training some assistance to countries would be necessary for some time to come. It was felt that international assistance could effectively be concentrated on the training of professional statistical personnel to meet the growing needs of the developing countries.

12. The Sub-Committee felt that the training of professional statisticians was an urgent need in the developing countries, particularly in Africa, Asia and the Far East and the Middle East. While recognizing that UNESCO has a particular interest in statistical education arising from its general responsibility for education at the university level, the Sub-Committee emphasized that the efforts of the United Nations and the specialized agencies to meet this need should be part of an integrated programme so as to achieve the best possible results. The assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was required to establish integrated training facilities for statisticians in the main fields of statistics for which the United Nations and the specialized agencies are responsible. It was agreed that members of the Sub-Committee would be kept informed concerning intended projects for the establishment of statistical training institutes. The purpose of consultations between members of the Sub-Committee would be to examine the relative merits of the projects contemplated and to present selected joint projects to the UNDP and other authorities. Proposals for regional institutes, one in Asia and the Far East and another in East Africa,

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were already under consideration by the UNDP. Information on the details of these projects would be made available to members of the Sub-Committee by the Statistical Office of the United Nations so that the needs in the fields of interest to each agency could be taken fully into account. The Sub-Committee gave its strong support to the establishment of these two projects.

13. The Sub-Committee expressed its desire to have from the UNDP a statement of its policy in the matter of assistance in the establishment of training facilities in the field of statistics.

Technical assistance activities

14. The Sub-Committee had a discussion on technical assistance activities in the countries and decided to review the technical assistance programme in the field of statistics at a subsequent session, including the question of co-ordinating the programme of fellowships with that of training institutes and seminars.

Consistency of published statistics

15. Data on population have assumed particular importance in recent years and are required by the agencies in their studies, such as those on economic projections, future food supplies etc. The Statistical Office of the United Nations, which has the primary responsibility in the field of population statistics, would provide means by which the agencies would be kept informed of the most recent data on population so that they may be able to use these as a single basic series in their work and publications.

Developments in computer methodology and their implications

16. In discussing the experiences of the agencies in computer processing of the statistical data, the Sub-Committee recognized that this was an important field for close co-operation between the agencies at the technical level. Among other things, the agencies should investigate the possibility of sharing systems analysts and programmes.

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Other matters

17. The Sub-Committee briefly discussed the question of country nomenclature and some aspects of the work carried out by the agencies relating to population censuses, vital statistics, social security statistics and costs of medical care. Consideration was also given to the problem of representation at the numerous meetings on international statistical questions; the Sub-Committee decided to discuss this problem at its next session.

18. The Sub-Committee noted with satisfaction that a larger number of countries were now reporting to the International Trade Statistics Centre and that it had been possible for the agencies to use the Centre to an increasing degree.

19. The Sub-Committee was informed that a new draft of the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) is in preparation, taking into account the comments received from countries and agencies on the earlier draft circulated by the Statistical Office of the United Nations. The new draft will be considered at the fifteenth session of the Commission (see E/CN.3/359).

20. A first draft of the groupings of the Standard International Trade Classification in broad economic categories (BEC) was prepared to meet the needs of economic analysis. The fourteenth session of the Commission asked for revision of the BEC classification, and the new draft will be circulated to countries and agencies before submission to the Commission at its fifteenth session (see E/CN.3/382).

21. The Sub-Committee heard a statement from the Director of the Forestry and Forest Industries Division of FAO on the difficulties of classification encountered in the foreign trade statistics of paper and paperboard arising out of technological developments in this field. The Sub-Committee was further informed of the proposal made by OECD for the revision of SITC, revised to meet the new needs (see E/CN.3/384). It was agreed that this sector of the SITC needs revision, which must take into account not only the new needs of the users, but also the requirements of statistical comparability over time. The Sub-Committee noted that the necessary revisions in the SITC for this purpose would be carried out by the United Nations in consultation with FAO.

22. The Sub-Committee recommended that its second session should take place immediately before the fifteenth session of the Commission.

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ANNEX

INTERRELATED FIELDS OF STATISTICS

1. Statistical techniques and terminology
 - Sampling
 - Household surveys
 - Data processing
2. Census programme
 - Population
 - Housing
 - Agriculture
3. Forest inventory
4. Fishery statistics
5. Trade statistics
 - SITC (Standard International Trade Classification)
 - Definitions and methods
6. Industrial statistics
 - ISIC (International Standard Industrial Classification)
7. Labour statistics
 - ISCO (International Standard Classification of Occupations)
 - Employment, unemployment and under-employment
 - Statistics of wages and hours of work
8. Vital statistics
 - Principles of vital statistics system
9. Education statistics
 - ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education)
10. Financial statistics
 - Balance of payments
 - Public finance
 - Government debt (external)

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11. System of national accounts
12. Price statistics
13. Statistics of distribution and transport
14. Health statistics
 - International classification of diseases
 - Principles of health statistics system
