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(d) National Household Survey Capability Programme

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY
CAPABILITY PROGRAMME

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

On the recommendation of the Statistical Commission at its nineteenth session, the Economic and Social Council in May 1977 adopted resolution 2055 (LXII) supporting the establishment of a National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP) in developing countries. The present document reports on progress in the establishment of that Programme. It restates the objective and philosophy of the Programme and describes the preparatory work undertaken for the donor meeting envisaged in the resolution. It also discusses a possible organization design.

The Commission may wish to comment on the progress report and endorse the approach that has been taken. It may also wish to make suggestions on the next steps to be pursued in implementing the programme.

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its nineteenth session, the Statistical Commission approved a draft resolution for adoption by the Economic and Social Council, supporting the establishment, in interested developing countries, of enduring national capabilities to carry out household surveys on a continuing basis. ^{1/} The statistics from these surveys would supplement and complement data from other sources, especially censuses and administrative records. The uniqueness of the programme lies in its focus on enabling countries to develop durable survey capabilities best suited to their individual needs and priorities.

2. The Commission requested a progress report on the programme at its twentieth session and the present document has been prepared in response to that request.

I. ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

3. The Commission may wish to comment on the progress report, endorse the approach that has been taken and make suggestions on the next steps to be pursued in implementing the programme.

II. NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY CAPABILITY PROGRAMME

A. Economic and Social Council resolution 2055 (LXII)

4. The draft resolution approved by the Commission was adopted by the Economic and Social Council, with some minor amendments, on 5 May 1977 as resolution 2055 (LXII).

5. The Council in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the resolution requested the Secretary-General "to provide all necessary support for this programme" and the Secretary-General and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "in co-operation with the World Bank and in consultation with other multilateral and bilateral donor agencies, to convene a meeting, as soon as is practicable, to consider ways and means of carrying out this necessary and important development activity, including the provision of resources for needed intercountry technical advice and training in this statistical field".

6. Considerable progress has been made since the resolution was adopted in May 1977. Before reporting on this progress it might be appropriate to restate briefly the primary objective of the programme - called the National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP) - and the rationale of the approach that has been taken.

^{1/} Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Sixty-second Session, Supplement No. 2 (E/5910), paras. 162-174.

B. Objective and rationale

7. The approach taken reflects, more visibly than in the past, the directions in technical co-operation that the Statistical Commission, the Governing Council of UNDP and others have emphasized in recent years, namely, that the ultimate purpose of technical assistance should be to foster self-reliance. The major aim of technical co-operation in statistics should, therefore, be to upgrade the capabilities of the countries so as to enable them to carry out their functions in time, unassisted, in line with their own national priorities and concerns. In this approach, national efforts to satisfy immediate statistical needs are fully supported and the need for comparable data for international purposes is taken into account, but the explicit, overriding goal of the technical assistance activity is the strengthening of national capabilities.

8. A national household survey capability offers to a developing country a number of fundamental advantages in the collection and analysis of its social and economic statistics. Once an appropriate sampling frame has been designed and a satisfactory field organization created - basic steps in establishing a capability - a programme consisting of ongoing survey rounds may be designed, and universal but flexible coverage of the population is facilitated. Data can be gathered on the entire population of a country, including the rural population and the traditional sector or, if required, on special population categories that may be of particular interest for use in policy or programme analysis. Such population categories can be selected according to any geographical, income, employment, sex or other characteristics considered important in the national or local circumstances. Developing countries have many pressing needs for data and NHSCP can be a major instrument for meeting these needs. The concept of NHSCP, crossing as it does sectoral and institutional boundaries, implies considerable ramifications into various spheres of a country's statistical activities. In developing a household survey programme, special attention needs to be given to ensure that it is co-ordinated and integrated with other statistical activities so that, on the one hand, full advantage is taken of available facilities without duplicating them and, on the other, meaningful and integrated statistics are produced. Thus it is intended to urge countries to set up appropriate machinery to oversee the programme and to ensure that the needs of the various governmental departments are taken into account and that priorities are adhered to.

9. Subject-matter coverage and organization are likewise extremely flexible. A continuing multiple-round survey or programme of surveys may cover a wide range of subjects and, if properly designed, can accumulate invaluable measurement experience, on the one hand, and trend or updated information, on the other. Such continuing survey-taking activities also lend themselves to step-by-step innovation and experiment and to the detailed investigation of such complex topics as income and employment, nutrition, literacy, health and other elements affecting the levels of living. As the cumulative process advances, the marginal unit cost of additional and improved data output is expected to drop considerably depending, of course, on the nature of the successive rounds or surveys. Likewise, as experience is gained in running a permanent field organization and data processing activity, timeliness can be enhanced to the point where key series can be made available soon after field work, and the policy maker's urgent needs for data on important topics can be met without unnecessary delay.

10. It is increasingly recognized that the household plays a key role in development in developing countries. Not only is it in the household that the impact of development on living conditions must be measured, but it is there that much productive activity is organized, including most of the agricultural sector and the so-called "traditional" sector. A national household survey capability is the only systematic way to investigate the household as a complex economic and social unit and measure its role in national activities.

11. With the ability to conduct properly organized and continuing surveys, statistical services would be in a position to supply integrated data on employment, other productive activity, income, consumption and expenditure, together with related social and demographic statistics required for the assessment of problems and issues in such areas as rural development, mass poverty, population programmes and maternal and child health. It further has to be borne in mind that the permanent field organization that will be established or upgraded will also contribute to the improvement of agricultural, industrial, employment, price and other statistics. Thus a continuing survey organization provides a basis for securing up-to-date and integrated information for policy formulation and for programme planning and evaluation. Moreover, it provides a vehicle for experimentation with concepts, definitions, questionnaires etc. within the context of the diverse needs and circumstances of individual countries.

12. Thus, NHSCP is designed to establish enduring instruments for helping to achieve self-reliance in the sphere of national statistics. It represents a vital element in the building of effective infrastructures in the interested developing countries to secure integrated and up-to-date statistics, on a continuing and self-sustaining basis, that would supplement and complement data from other sources, especially censuses and administrative records. In the execution of the Programme, it is accordingly essential to utilize fully the vast experience and facilities of the United Nations and the specialized agencies in diverse statistical fields. The Programme will be designed to accomplish this, as well as to ensure effective co-ordination of the activities of participating organizations, which is necessary if common objectives are to be reached efficiently.

C. Preparatory activities

13. Following the adoption of the Council resolution, a report on the objectives and structure of the programme was prepared by the United Nations Statistical Office in September 1977 and circulated to interested organizations and countries for comment. Widespread interest was manifested in the Programme and, on the basis of the comments received, a revised report was issued in November 1977; this report was presented at the December 1977 session of the International Statistical Institute, held at New Delhi, and at a study session on household surveys in developing countries organized by the Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris in November 1977. The response to the report was overwhelmingly positive, with particularly strong expressions of support from representatives of developing countries.

14. In response to the resolution, the then Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs invited the heads of UNDP, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to designate representatives to participate in the planning for a meeting of bilateral and multilateral funding organizations. These agencies have replied very positively, have participated actively in the preparation for the meeting and have offered strong support.

15. A special meeting of the interested members of the Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination was held in June 1977 to consider further co-ordination to support NHSCP. The meeting examined the progress on and plans for NHSCP and drew attention to its relationship to the recommendations of the World Employment Conference concerning the use and development of household surveys to quantify basic needs and measure progress towards their fulfilment.

16. NHSCP was also discussed and strongly endorsed at the twelfth session, in February 1978, of the Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities and it was emphasized that all activities to establish the Programme should be carried out with the fullest co-operation of the interested specialized agencies.

17. The Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination of the Statistical Commission discussed NHSCP on the basis of an oral report by the Director of the United Nations Statistical Office (June 1977) and "unanimously endorsed the Programme, its conception and characteristics. The Working Group emphasized, in particular: (a) the aim to create enduring infrastructure within countries, (b) the focus on country needs and priorities, (c) the ability to obtain needed disaggregated data and (d) the influence the Programme would have in the integration of economic and social statistics. The Working Group stressed that some adjustments in other areas of technical assistance and of countries' own projects might be desirable to provide full support to the household survey programme. It was suggested that a step-by-step approach would be most appropriate for the Programme, with the least developed countries in any region receiving due attention" (E/CN.3/502, para. 82).

18. With the assistance of the regional commissions, a preliminary assessment of country needs, and hence the over-all dimensions of the Programme, was made. In all, some 50 countries might require substantial assistance in establishing national household survey capabilities; an additional 20 or more might require assistance for upgrading or integrating existing capabilities and some 20 would require little or no assistance.

19. It was agreed by both the multilateral donor agencies and the specialized agencies that it was necessary to secure detailed information through missions to a sample of developing countries in order to prepare a prospectus for the meeting of funding agencies and to specify in detail the kind of assistance that may be required, its volume and the possible role of various national and international bodies.

20. In co-operation with the regional commissions and the interested specialized agencies, identification missions to some 30 developing countries representing all developing regions were carried out, with UNDP support, and detailed information was collected on existing survey capabilities, the uses that had been made of them, the requirements for improvement and the priority the Governments attached to the Programme. A considerable amount of material was obtained, including outlines of a number of country projects for implementation. On the basis of this and other material a prospectus for the donor meeting will be prepared.

21. The prospectus will indicate the basic purpose of NHSCP in the context of the present capacities and needs of developing countries, together with a brief history of its development to date, an outline of the proposed organization and funding design and a rationale for the patterns recommended. It will emphasize the uniqueness of the Programme in that it is aimed primarily at developing durable national capacities and will use the material obtained from the identification missions to present some costed examples of country projects within a time frame.

22. Drafts of the prospectus and other documents for the donor meeting will be discussed at length with the potential bilateral and multilateral donors in a succession of visits to both the technical co-operation and the statistics departments of the donor countries with a view to arriving at a proposal offering the best prospects of being favourably received at the donor meeting. These visits are scheduled to take place during the last quarter of 1978. The results of the discussions will be provided in an oral report to the Commission.

D. Programme and funding design

23. It is intended that NHSCP will be the occasion for bilateral and multilateral donors to join forces with a view to providing support for the Programme in a unified way to achieve the same goal, namely, national capability. In addition to assistance from multilateral agencies, the design of the Programme will encourage direct bilateral assistance from a donor country to a recipient country. The bulk of the assistance will thus flow directly to the countries. The operational ~~locus~~ will be in the regional commissions, which will have to be strengthened to enable them to carry out their advisory functions.

24. The organization and funding design are yet to be finalized but one of the likeliest options is outlined here. The statistical divisions of the regional commissions in the four developing regions will be the focal points for the implementation of the Programme. They will be responsible for detailed project formation, the day-to-day implementation of the country projects, site visits, detailed review of the country reports and much of the specialized technical advice. Advisers covering the major technical specializations connected with household surveys will be available to visit countries on request. The regular staff of the regional commissions will provide further technical support as needed.

25. It is anticipated that in the case of some countries, particularly the least developed, full-time experts will be required for certain periods of time. There

will also be need for considerable funding at the country level for data processing and surveying equipment, transport costs, training programmes, publication expenses and various local salary costs. In fact it is at the country level that most of the support will be required. The direct country support will be partly bilateral and partly from the major multilateral donor agencies.

26. To attract donor support for NHSCP, the Programme needs to be separately identifiable and effectively administered. To make use of the experience and facilities of the United Nations and the specialized agencies, the Programme needs to be integrated as much as possible within the United Nations statistical system. The twin aims of separate visibility and technical integration could be fulfilled by establishing a small international co-ordinating unit, reporting to the Director of the United Nations Statistical Office. The regular staff of the Statistical Office would provide further technical support as needed in the course of execution of the Programme.

27. In addition to being responsible for the over-all co-ordination of the Programme, for ensuring the appropriate exchange of experience and information and for providing technical advice through the United Nations Statistical Office over and above that given by the regions and the specialized agencies, the co-ordinating unit will be responsible for promoting the Programme and ensuring the regular flow of funds and other resources. There will be an unusual financial picture inasmuch as it is expected that there will be at least some half a dozen donors, and a considerable part of the assistance will be in the form of direct bilateral assistance between a donor and receiving country. The unit will, therefore, be responsible for piecing together the various financial and other aid elements of the Programme. In order to ensure technical and regional balance and to avoid duplication, on the one hand, and gaps on the other, the unit will maintain an up-to-date picture of the funding and other resource provisions and of various issues that may arise in the course of the implementation of the project - partly to inform the donors of the over-all situation and partly to decide where additional support might be needed. It will also offer to donors, where requested, a preliminary certification of the feasibility of projects submitted for funding.

28. It is planned to establish a steering committee to provide guidance on both technical and organizational aspects of the Programme, meeting perhaps once a year. The committee will serve both to respond to the concerns of the donor agencies and to ensure that the needs of the recipient countries are fully reflected in the implementation of the Programme. The committee might consist of half a dozen distinguished statisticians familiar with survey problems drawn from both the academic and the governmental community and from both developed and developing countries; representatives of the United Nations, including the regional commissions, and the interested specialized agencies; and the major donor agencies.

29. The donor meeting is planned to take place in the second quarter of 1979. The exact time and place have not yet been finalized but the Commission will be informed orally of the details during the discussion. The participants at the donor meeting will include the interested donors, a representative selection of developing countries, the regional commissions and interested specialized agencies.