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TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION: 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 twentieth session, the Economic and Social Council in May 1979 adopted resolution 1979/5 reconfirming support for the establishment of a National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP), in developing countries. The present document reports on progress in the establishment of the Programme and describes the preparatory work being undertaken in the development of country projects as envisaged in the Council resolution. Points for discussion by the Commission are included (para. 22).

\* E/CN.3/535.

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## INTRODUCTION

1. At its twentieth session, the Statistical Commission approved a draft resolution for adoption by the Economic and Social Council, reconfirming its support of the establishment, in interested developing countries, of enduring national capabilities to carry out household surveys on a continuing basis. 1/
2. The Commission requested a progress report on the National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP), for its twenty-first session, and the present document has been prepared in response to that request.

## I. RECENT ACTIVITIES

3. The draft resolution approved by the Commission was adopted by the Economic and Social Council without a vote on 9 May 1979 as resolution 1979/5.
4. A consultative meeting on NHSCP, convened by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), took place in New York on 21 and 22 June 1979. The meeting was attended by representatives of donor countries, multilateral assistance agencies, developing countries, the United Nations Statistical Office and the interested specialized agencies. The consultative meeting, which in effect launched the Programme, expressed its strong support for the Programme and a number of donors expressed willingness in principle to support country projects, each case to be examined on its merits. As a result of constructive suggestions made at the meeting, a draft Prospectus that the meeting considered was revised, printed and distributed. A popular synoptic version was also prepared. Copies of the Prospectus will be made available to members of the Commission during the session.
5. One of the proposals of the consultative meeting was that a Central Co-ordinating Unit be established in the United Nations Statistical Office for the further promotion and co-ordination of the Programme. It would also be responsible for ensuring the appropriate exchange of experience and information and for providing technical advice through the Statistical Office over and above that given by the regional commissions and the specialized agencies. The Unit was set up with the help of contributions from UNDP, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which, together with contributions in kind by the Statistical Office, amount to about half a million dollars per annum. A Programme Co-ordinator was appointed in October 1979 and two senior professional advisers were appointed in 1980. The funds will also be used for consultants, technical meetings and the related costs of administrative services, travel and dissemination of materials.
6. The Programme was discussed by the Latin American chief statisticians during the fourteenth session of the Committee on Improvement of National Statistics

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1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1979, Supplement No. 3 (E/1979/23), paras. 1 and 207-209.

(COINS), of the Inter-American Statistical Institute (October 1979). A sub-committee of COINS was set up to consider, among other things, the goals and objectives of the Inter-American Household Survey Programme within the framework of NHSCP and the basis for co-ordination of the two programmes. The National Household Survey Capability Programme was also discussed at the first session of the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers (March-April 1980). In addition, NHSCP was discussed or described at the forty-second session of the International Statistical Institute (December 1979), the World Fertility Survey Steering Committee (December 1979), the World Bank Expert Group on Measurement of Levels of Living (February 1980) and at the United Nations Expert Group on Revision of the United Nations Handbook of Household Surveys (March 1980). There are also plans to discuss NHSCP at the Conference of European Statisticians (June 1980) and the Meeting of Commonwealth Statisticians (December 1980).

7. A series of technical regional meetings on household survey programmes in the context of NHSCP have taken place or are being planned. An expert group meeting for the African region took place in October 1979 and similar meetings for the Asian and Latin American regions are planned for September and October 1980, respectively. In addition, it is hoped that periodic technical meetings will be held of the regional advisers connected with the Programme and other experts, including those of the interested specialized agencies. The first of these technical meetings is tentatively planned for the first quarter of 1981.

8. The specialized agencies have been kept informed of developments through visits and correspondence and their collaboration continues to be most positive. In addition to the provision of regional advisers, the specialized agencies have made valuable contributions to the revised Handbook of Household Surveys and participated in the expert group on the Handbook (see para. 6 above). The National Household Survey Capability Programme was discussed at the fourteenth session of the Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination and was once again strongly supported.

9. Considerable attention has been given to specifying working arrangements with the regional commissions and to strengthening their survey advisory services. The Central Co-ordinating Unit has held extensive discussions with the regional commissions and a set of initial arrangements for co-operation has been established. The regional commissions are playing a vital role in the implementation of the Programme and they are either acquiring new posts or adjusting the duties of existing advisory posts to cover related survey activities, as necessary. Both the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) have filled all but one of their immediately needed posts, while the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has filled all but two and is expected to establish at least one more in the near future. The Economic Commission for Western Asia (ECWA) has only one survey advisory post but will secure several more. The International Labour Office has contributed three advisory posts, one each to ECA, ECLA and ESCAP; the incumbents have been fully active as members of the regional advisory teams. The regional statistician of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, located at ECA, is likewise participating actively in NHSCP.

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10. At its eighth session, in October 1979, 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. It "expressed satisfaction at the progress that had been made since the twentieth session of the Statistical Commission and reiterated its strong support for the programme as a major undertaking of the whole United Nations statistical system" (E/CN.3/536, para. 60). It emphasized the importance of the primary objective of the programme, which is to create survey-taking capabilities in developing countries in terms of national needs and priorities.
11. Considerable efforts have been devoted to country missions. When a country expresses interest in NHSCP, a joint Statistical Office regional commission exploratory mission is arranged for the purpose of preparing a draft project proposal. The project proposal includes information on the existing survey capability of the country, the long-term needs of users, a proposed survey programme, cost estimates and amounts needed from external sources, etc. The project proposal is also used for subsequent discussions with potential donors.
12. By mid-1980, exploratory missions had been carried out in the following countries: Afghanistan, Bolivia, Botswana, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Fiji, Kenya, Mali, Nicaragua, Samoa, Senegal, Sudan, Thailand, Tonga and United Republic of Cameroon. It is expected that missions will be carried out in several additional countries in 1980 or early 1981, possibly including Bangladesh, Cuba, Guyana, Jordan, Morocco, Somalia and Sri Lanka.
13. Discussions were held with local representatives of donor countries during the exploratory missions and in the first half of 1980 with headquarters personnel of bilateral aid agencies at Washington, Tokyo and Canberra. In all cases, support of NHSCP was indicated. Useful discussions were also held with representatives of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF in New York and with the country and regional representatives of these agencies and interested specialized agencies. There are plans to approach several potential donors in the second half of 1980 to solicit their support for specific country projects for which project proposals have been completed and approved by the country concerned. Some funding has been committed for projects in Botswana, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka and Sudan, and attempts will be made to secure funding for some dozen country projects by the end of 1981. Consideration is also being given to holding a second consultative meeting of donors in the second quarter of 1981 to review progress and to enlist further support for the programme.
14. An evaluation has been made of the experience of the missions carried out thus far, and one of the major conclusions was the need to prepare a series of guidelines. They are in the process of being prepared and include a general set of guidelines for country missions, guidelines for implementation arrangements with the regional commissions and guidelines for technical studies and standards. It is also intended to issue a periodic NHSCP information note to allow for dissemination of information about the Programme.
15. Notwithstanding the large quantity of material already available and the forthcoming revision of the Handbook of Household Surveys, experience to date has

confirmed the need for further technical manuals and related studies on key elements in the building of national survey capabilities. There are problems common to many countries in data processing, training, controlling non-sampling errors, organization and management of survey operations and methods for ensuring that the results of successive surveys can be interlinked and used jointly for analysis. The National Household Survey Capability Programme is expected to serve as a focal point for a co-ordinated approach in the preparation of materials, and sets of specifications are being prepared for carrying out detailed studies in the above-mentioned fields.

16. The limited finances of the Central Co-ordinating Unit will, of course, prevent it from assuming responsibility for carrying out all the studies, but modest sums have been earmarked to engage consultants to initiate the work. Efforts will be made to enlist the interest of other organizations either to help finance or carry out the detailed studies in collaboration with the Statistical Office. There is, of course, no intention of duplicating the work of other bodies and, in fact, the relevant work of such bodies will be an important input into the NHSCP co-ordinated activities.

## II. SOME MAJOR ISSUES

17. The Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination requested that some of the major co-ordination and organizational issues that were encountered in the implementation of NHSCP should be brought to the attention of the Statistical Commission (E/CN.3/536, para. 62). Paragraphs 18-21 below summarize some lessons from the experience to date.

18. It is necessary to strengthen the awareness that the sample survey is one of three instruments for obtaining statistics, the other two being censuses and administrative records, and that the three instruments are complementary, that is to say that the statistics derived from each can be used jointly with one another, provided care is taken that the design of the concepts, definitions, classifications and methods are compatible with one another. Moreover, awareness needs to be strengthened that the development of such integrated statistics involves constant communication and collaboration between the producers of the statistics and that such communication and collaboration do not happen automatically but rather involve the establishment of appropriate machinery in the national statistical office.

19. It is obvious that statistics are not ends in themselves but intermediate products, the benefits of which depend on the extent to which they are used in analysis, programme planning, policy and administration. Thus, constant communication with users is necessary to ensure that the statistics are relevant to user needs and that they are put to use. However, in practice, the statisticians in many developing countries work in relative isolation. This is owing in part to the difficulty of getting the users to specify their needs in sufficient detail required for operational purposes and in part to feelings of pride and concern with demarcation. Whatever the reason, the situation, where it exists, is particularly serious for NHSCP, because a continuing programme

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renders necessary a continuous dialogue between the users and producers of statistics. Only in this way will the resulting statistics be relevant to the users and the probabilities of use of the statistics maximized; moreover, in this way, full advantage can be taken of the flexibility afforded by a continuing programme to respond to changing needs of users. Thus an important function of NHSCP is sharpening the awareness of the lack of dialogue and influencing the creation of the appropriate machinery to overcome it.

20. Experience to date has confirmed the fact that bilateral and multilateral donors do not automatically co-ordinate their activities even when they are directed to identical objectives, and that NHSCP can serve as an effective umbrella for promoting co-ordination. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of such co-ordination, particularly at the country level. Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of such co-ordination, it will in fact continue to be deficient without arrangements such as those involved in the course of promoting and implementing NHSCP.

21. At present, the capabilities of the regional commissions vary in relation to the demands of NHSCP. A question arises as to the extent to which the capabilities of regional commissions, together with those of the interested specialized agencies in their respective fields, should be strengthened in anticipation of demands by countries rather than after the demands have materialized. In all cases, moreover, some further strengthening will probably be needed to cope with problems of implementation when a number of country projects are established in the same region at the same time.

### III. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

22. The Commission may wish to make general comments on recent NHSCP activities, as well as on country projects and discussions with donors (paras. 11-13), a programme of technical manuals and related studies (paras. 15-16) and problems of co-ordination (paras. 18-20).

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