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CO-ORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and
Co-ordination: report on the tenth session

SUMMARY

At its tenth session, the Working Group reviewed the statistical programmes of international organizations (paras. 5-6) and the provisional agenda for the twenty-third session of the Statistical Commission (para. 7), made suggestions on the timing and content of the documentation (paras. 8-25), decided to discontinue the practice of identifying documents as for discussion or for information (para. 26), discussed the special topics that the Commission might wish to consider at its twenty-fourth session (para. 27) and considered the co-ordination of statistical data-collection activities (paras. 28-29).

* E/CN.3/1985/1.

INTRODUCTION

1. The tenth session of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination of the Statistical Commission was held at Geneva from 26 to 28 September 1983. The agenda, as adopted, is contained in the annex to the present report.
2. Pursuant to the decision of the Working Group at its earlier sessions, the officers of the Commission who attended served as officers of the Working Group, with Ms. V. Nyitrai (Hungary) acting as Chairman of the session. Other members present were: Mr. E. Oti Boateng (Ghana), Mr. T. P. Linehan (Ireland), Mr. Khoo Teik Huat (Malaysia) and Mr. V. I. Gureyev (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics).
3. The following were represented: the United Nations Statistical Office, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the European Economic Community (EEC), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO).
4. In its deliberations, aimed at facilitating the work of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-third session, the Working Group took into account the recommendations and decisions made at its previous sessions and at those of the Statistical Commission and other relevant intergovernmental bodies, as well as the views of the Secretariat in response to and after reflection upon the decisions of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-second session.

I. REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

5. For its consideration of agenda item 3, the Working Group had before it the following reports of the Secretary-General: "Progress report on statistical data processing" (E/CN.3/1983/23), "Technical co-operation in statistics by the United Nations system, other international organizations and countries" (E/CN.3/1983/25), "Progress report on the statistical work of the international organizations" (E/CN.3/1983/27) and "Future plans in statistics of the international organizations" (E/CN.3/1983/28). Those documents, which had been discussed at the twenty-second session of the Statistical Commission, gave a comprehensive picture of the work done and planned for further development and improvement in statistics by the international organizations. The Working Group agreed that, in the future, more emphasis should be given to training as part of the overall technical co-operation in statistics, since it was basic to building national capabilities in statistics. It also agreed that more attention should be paid to achieving better comparability of statistical data at the international level.

6. The Working Group expressed the view that greater continuity in its membership would be useful in its future work and requested the Secretariat to examine possible methods of achieving it.

II. AGENDA AND DOCUMENTATION FOR THE TWENTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION

7. The Working Group endorsed the provisional agenda that had been approved by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-second session, with the amendment of one item. Agenda item 7 was amended to read "Industry, energy and environment statistics" in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1983/53 of 28 July 1983 entitled "Standardization of definitions and terminology for mineral resources". By that resolution, the Secretary-General was requested "to take into account the recommendations in the report [of the expert group] relating to the activities of the United Nations in the reporting, compilation and publication of statistics on mineral production and consumption" and "to consider which additional activities would be required to implement those recommendations, including those concerning definitions and terminology for individual minerals and metals, and statistics on the secondary recovery of metals" and to report to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-third session on the progress made.

8. The Working Group requested that all documents in all languages should be available well in advance of the Commission session.

9. The Working Group noted that the contents of the documents for the twenty-third session of the Commission were determined partly by the need to complete the drafting by May 1984 so that translation and reproduction might be completed in time to make very early distribution possible. The Working Group expressed the view that there was a need to provide written updated information, especially on the most important agenda items, that was more current at the time of the Commission session. The Secretariat was requested to investigate ways of meeting the need.

10. The Working Group approved the outlines of the documents for each agenda item, as set out in a restricted document entitled "Proposals and outlines for documentation for the twenty-third session of the Statistical Commission", with the following exceptions and comments:

Agenda item 3. Special issues

Agenda item 3 (a). Meeting user needs for international statistics and improving the dissemination of international statistics

11. The Working Group accepted that the document would deal with the publications and areas of responsibility of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat but that incidental references to the products and areas of responsibility of other international organizations could be made. The Working Group requested that special attention should be given to:

- (a) The impact of modern data processing on the structure and composition of the products needed by users;
- (b) The methods of informing users of the total range of statistical services that can be made available;
- (c) The reduction in the time-lag between the availability of data and their publication;
- (d) The need for continuing interaction between the users and producers of statistics;
- (e) The importance of libraries as users of statistical publications; and
- (f) The identification of what users need, the frequency and urgency of the need and the preferred method of meeting it.

Agenda item 3 (b). Future direction of work on social indicators

12. The Working Group stressed that the co-ordination of data collection, processing and the maintenance of data bases should be emphasized. Clear definitions of the special population groups mentioned in the outline of chapter IV should be provided, and the document should clearly define future directions, questions and problems in this area and help orient countries towards the development of national social indicators. In chapter IV, special attention should be given to indicators on youth, since it is an important area for both developed and developing countries.

Agenda item 3 (c). Publication policy for statistics

13. The document should incorporate full information on the broad aspects of publication policy, as well as on any financial limitations. It should deal with how to improve the practices of publication of statistics and how to avoid undesirable duplication. The utilization of modern technology in preparing publications should be reported on. The impact of data availability in machine-readable form on the demand for data in printed form should be reviewed. The practice and plans for publishing directories, either internally within the United Nations system or externally by commercial organizations, should be treated. Cost information on the various publications should be provided to the extent possible. The document should also summarize the relevant discussion by the Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination at its recent sessions.

Agenda item 4. National accounts and balances

14. The Working Group agreed that two documents should be prepared. The first one should be a report on the revision of the System of National Accounts (SNA) and the development and revision of supplementary guidelines and of handbooks on sources and methods of national accounting; the second one should be on the links between SNA and the System of Balances of the National Economy (MPS). The Working Group

stressed that the work on the revision of the SNA should take into account the interests and problems of the developing countries. An important aspect of this was the need to emphasize non-market imputations, since they are important for proper measurement within a country and for the improvement of the international comparability of statistics on national accounts. The Working Group emphasized the growing importance of the work on SNA/MPS links to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Latin America and several of their member countries. The Working Group decided that the document should include a statement on the progress made on comparisons and an indication of what remains to be done; it was thought that this would help give direction to future work. The Working Group decided that the document should summarize the results of the bilateral comparisons in quantitative terms.

Agenda item 5. International economic classifications

15. The Working Group agreed that this was one of the most important issues on the agenda of the twenty-third session of the Statistical Commission. It endorsed the outline of the document and the submission of three draft classifications to the Commission. The Working Group expressed appreciation of the work of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, and other international organizations and experts participating in the United Nations Statistical Office/Statistical Office of the European Communities Joint Working Group on World-Level Classifications.

Agenda item 6. Price statistics

16. The Working Group decided that chapter I of the document should present not only a summary of the phase IV results of the International Comparison Project (ICP) but also an analysis of the utility of combining regional results to produce overall, world-wide results. The report should also include a description of the work done by the International Labour Office in revising its food price inquiry on the basis that the items for which prices will be collected will be a sub-set of the food items in the ICP list of commodities. The Working Group re-emphasized the importance of completing the ICP manual as quickly as possible. It noted that there would be a sales publication on the results of phase IV of ICP, as there had been for the previous phases.

Agenda item 7. Industry, energy and environment statistics

17. The Working Group agreed that there should be two documents. One should be a report on standards, methods and classifications of energy statistics and on the environment statistics programme, including the methodological work carried out; the other should be on the development of statistics of mineral resources.

18. The Working Group emphasized that the document on energy and environment statistics should include information in chapter I.A on the progress in the international classification of energy.

19. The Working Group agreed that the document on the development of statistics for mineral purposes should deal with:

- (a) Progress on expanding the list of minerals and metals on which data are collected and published by the Statistical Office;
- (b) Methodological development concerning statistics on the secondary recovery of metals;
- (c) Extension of the work on mineral consumption statistics and raw materials balances.

Agenda item 8. Demographic and social statistics

20. The Working Group decided to postpone two documents proposed for the twenty-third session of the Statistical Commission, namely, the report on recent developments in national population registration systems and their statistical use and the report on national practices in coding country of birth or citizenship in compiling international migration statistics.

21. The Working Group agreed to the outline for the report on the 1985-1994 World Population and Housing Census Programme, on the understanding that chapter III would contain summary information from ILO. ILO agreed to provide more extensive, updated information for the Commission in all the official languages early in 1985. The Working Group agreed that it would be desirable to include in the report the results of the seminar on population and housing censuses, scheduled to be held early in 1984 by the Economic Commission for Europe.

Agenda item 9. Technical co-operation

22. The Working Group decided that there should be four documents. The first one should be an overall report on technical co-operation, including chapters on new issues in statistical training and on new issues in statistical data processing. The second one should be a progress report on the National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP); it was agreed that the document should provide, in chapter VII (Points for discussion), the opportunity to discuss the effectiveness of the technical co-operation provided through NHSCP. The third one should be a progress report on the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS). The fourth one should deal with the special problems of the statistically least developed among the developing countries. It should be based on information from the regional commissions and other interested international organizations and on the experience of the statistical experts who have worked in those countries. The Working Group agreed that it was important also to obtain information directly from those countries.

23. The Working Group decided to postpone the proposed document on the assessment of the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics to a later session of the Statistical Commission and requested the Secretariat to investigate suitable approaches to the problem, since it was considered an important issue. The Working Group decided to delete the separate documents on statistical training and on statistical data processing, since those issues would be included in the overall report mentioned in paragraph 22 above.

24. The Working Group agreed that a directory of available bilateral and multilateral technical co-operation in statistics would be useful and requested the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat to finalize work on it.

25. The Working Group agreed on the documentation for the following three agenda items, as proposed in the restricted document:

Item 10. Co-ordination and integration of international statistics programmes;

Item 11. Programme implementation;

Item 12. Programme objectives and planning.

III. DOCUMENTS FOR DISCUSSION OR FOR INFORMATION

26. On the basis of the experience at the twenty-second session of the Statistical Commission, the Working Group decided to discontinue the practice of identifying documents as for discussion or for information, which had been introduced at that session on an experimental basis.

IV. SPECIAL TOPICS TO BE TAKEN UP BY THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION DURING ITS NEXT SEVERAL SESSIONS

27. The Working Group discussed agenda item 5 on the basis of a restricted note entitled "Consolidated list of special topics" as well as a document of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES/489). The Working Group recommended that the following topics should be considered as special issues at the twenty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission, in 1987:

(a) The future form of the world statistical system (that is, international and national agencies), covering the structural characteristics of relationships;

(b) Special problems in the statistically least developed among the developing countries, including consideration of the appropriateness of the existing international statistical guidelines for those countries;

(c) The interrelations between statistical services and the emerging network of data bases.

V. CO-ORDINATION OF THE STATISTICAL DATA-COLLECTION ACTIVITIES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

28. The Working Group discussed agenda item 6 on the basis of a restricted note entitled "Inventory of statistical data-collection activities". The document was prepared by the United Nations Statistical Office, based on information from the regional commissions, specialized agencies and, for the first time, from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Statistical Office of the European Communities and the World Tourism Organization, in response to a request by the Working Group at its ninth session. The Working Group welcomed the

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information relating to OECD, EUROSTAT and WTO and expressed appreciation of the work that had been done by all the organizations on the co-ordination of data collection and the exchange of data among the organizations. The Working Group endorsed the successful step-by-step approach that had been adopted by the organizations in co-ordinating their data-collection and sharing activities. The Working Group requested the international organizations to continue their efforts to co-ordinate international data-collection activities and the United Nations Statistical Office to review the coverage in the inventory of statistical data-collection activities in order to ensure consistency among the various contributors.

29. The Working Group requested that the inventory should be circulated to all national statistical offices as a means of informing them of the various requests made to their countries. At the same time, the United Nations Statistical Office should invite the national statistical offices to convey to it any comments they might have on co-ordination issues. The Statistical Office should bring the results of the inquiry to the attention of the Working Group at its eleventh session.

VI. DATE AND PLACE OF THE ELEVENTH SESSION

30. The Working Group recommended that its eleventh session should be held at Geneva from 26 to 28 August 1985.

Annex

AGENDA FOR THE TENTH SESSION

1. Election of officers
2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters
3. Review of international statistical programmes
4. Provisional agenda and documentation for the twenty-third session of the Statistical Commission
5. Special topics to be taken up by the Statistical Commission during its next several sessions
6. Co-ordination of the statistical data-collection activities of international organizations
7. Dates and place of the eleventh session
8. Other business
9. Report of the Working Group to the Statistical Commission
