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STATISTICAL COMMISSION
Twenty-third session
25 February-6 March 1985
Items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9
of the provisional agenda*

Updated information on the work of the Statistical Office
of the United Nations

Note by the Secretary-General

INTRODUCTION

1. At its tenth session, held at Geneva from 26 to 28 September 1983, the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination of the Statistical Commission 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 (E/CN.3/1985/17, para. 9). The present conference room paper is an effort to meet the request of the Working Group.

2. Updated information is provided below for those agenda items in respect of which significant developments have occurred since the relevant reports for the Statistical Commission were completed.

* E/CN.3/1985/1.

Agenda item 3. Special issues

(b) Future direction of work on social indicators

3. Work has commenced to compile and issue a Statistical Pocketbook on Youth in connection with the International Youth Year (1985). It is expected to be issued in 1985. It will consist of approximately 35 social and economic indicators selected to describe, in statistical terms, the situation of youth around the world. Funds for this activity were provided by the United Nations Trust Fund for the International Youth Year.

Agenda item 4. National accounts and balances

(a) System of National Accounts (SNA)

4. The SNA review has continued in a number of areas. Further case studies on the reconciliation between SNA and Balance of Payments (BOP) standards have been conducted in Canada, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands and the United States of America. Further studies for developing countries will be done in the first months of 1985. As a result, a first draft is available of a joint Statistical Office/IMF paper on the reconciliation of BOP and SNA, which will be presented at the 1985 General Conference of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth. Similar work has started on a joint Statistical Office/IMF paper with regard to the reconciliation between the Government Finance Statistics standards and SNA. Two case studies, for Colombia and Mexico, are now in progress, concerning the incorporation of household survey data in national accounts. Furthermore, a draft project document has been prepared and discussed for a seminar on national accounting for statistically least developed countries, which will include elements of training and will also deal with issues regarding the present SNA review. One regional meeting has been held since the progress report was drafted, namely, the EUROSTAT meeting in November 1984 which discussed inflation accounting, balance sheets and the subdivision of the household sector by socio-economic groups.

(b) Links between the System of National Accounts (SNA) and the System of Balances of the National Economy (MPS)

5. The Statistical Office continued work on improving the preliminary estimates of net material product for Canada shown in the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/1985/6). These improved calculations are under discussion with Statistics Canada, with a view to finalizing them for inclusion in a supplementary background paper for the Commission.

Agenda item 5. International economic classifications

6. After completion of the draft revision of the part of the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC) covering

activities producing transportable goods and the draft of the combined trade/production goods classification, a meeting of the Conference of European Statisticians on economic classifications was held at Geneva from 19 to 23 November 1984. The main purposes of this meeting were:

(a) To discuss a number of pending questions and the further completion of both draft classifications with activities and product categories dealing with services;

(b) To review the current draft classifications.

7. In order to facilitate the discussion, a paper was presented by the Statistical Office in which a number of principles and problems were raised. Special attention was given to topics such as the nature and purpose of the classifications, their mutual relationships, the need for other classifications or correspondence tables, interpretative rules, coding problems, the statistical units and some specific subjects like the treatment of energy-related activities, recycling and industrial services.

8. The discussions showed that much still has to be done in order to obtain satisfactory end products. At the same time, however, they resulted in a number of useful guidelines for the further development of the classifications concerned. As a consequence, work is now in progress within the Statistical Office to prepare slightly modified draft classifications and a provisional outline for the remaining parts, to be presented to the Joint United Nations Statistical Office/Statistical Office of the European Communities Joint Working Group at its fifth session to be held in June 1985 in Luxembourg.

9. In relation to the revision of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC), the Statistical Office has examined a set of correlation tables prepared by the Customs Co-operation Council establishing correspondence between the headings of the Customs Co-operation Council Nomenclature (CCCN) and those of the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS). On that basis, the correspondence which was established between the draft of the third revision of SITC, which is closely linked with CCCN, and the second revision of SITC, in respect of which the HS headings have been used as building blocks, as it appears in provisional ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/34/Rev.3 (second draft), has been modified.

10. Consequently, correspondence tables between the draft of the third revision of SITC and the second revision of SITC and vice versa are being drawn up. Every effort is being made to complete this exercise towards the end of December 1984 and to have those tables circulated to member States prior to the forthcoming session of the Statistical Commission.

Agenda item 6. Price statistics

11. Phase IV comparisons of the International Comparison Project (ICP) with reference year 1980, involving 59 countries, have been completed. Results for 10 European Economic Community (EEC) countries were released by EUROSTAT in 1983.

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These were followed by finalization of results by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean for 18 Latin American countries, by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for 19 of its member countries (including the 10 EEC countries) and by EUROSTAT for 15 African countries in late 1984. The results of world comparisons, obtained by linking those of the aforementioned 52 countries and 7 additional countries from the regions of the Economic Commission for Western Asia (ECWA) and the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), monitored directly by the Statistical Office, have now been finalized and are awaiting publication subject to clearance by the respective Governments.

12. Besides the periodic reviewing of progress relating to Phase IV comparisons and finalization of plans for Phase V comparisons, two major seminars were organized, one at Bellagio, Italy, from 24 to 28 September 1984 by the interorganizational group on ICP and another at Sapporo, Japan, from 16 to 22 October 1984 by ESCAP. The Bellagio seminar was addressed mostly to methodological problems, for example the derivation of global comparisons from the regional results through a core country approach, the feasibility of combining purchasing power parities (PPPs) at different levels of aggregation, supplementing of multilateral comparisons with binary comparisons as between members of one or more countries of each region, the obtaining of national average prices, etc. The Bellagio seminar adopted the 189 category expenditure classification of gross domestic product as prepared by the Statistical Office and a preliminary timetable for Phase V.

13. The Asia-Pacific seminar on ICP, held at Sapporo, considered the organization and implementation of Phase V and the direction of future work, the Phase V expenditure classification viewed as a target for the minimum to be adopted for world comparisons, and various conceptual and methodological issues underlying international comparisons. The seminar acknowledged the need for a comprehensive regional list of items with standard specifications for each item that would broadly reflect the pattern of final demand of the constituent countries of that region.

14. The first results of the International Price Statistics Programme covering the period 1970-1982 have been published as special tables in the August and October 1984 issues of the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics. It is expected that the last part of the results can be included in the the February 1985 issue of the Bulletin. The mailing to countries of new questionnaires covering the period 1971-1983 commenced in December 1984.

Agenda item 7. Industry, energy and environment statistics

(b) Energy and environment statistics

15. A training seminar was organized by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) in August 1984 in Tokyo. It was oriented to the officials engaged in the compilation and analysis of energy statistics. Its objectives were to provide training in the field of energy statistics in order to improve the

coverage, accuracy, timeliness and usefulness of energy statistics in the countries, and to encourage the analysis of energy statistics for use by planners and policy makers. The basic thrust was put on practical aspects of improving the compilation of energy statistics, including energy balances. The seminar was attended by participants from 13 countries of the FSCAP region. The representative of the Statistical Office presented lectures on various topics of energy statistics, including traditional fuels, accounting units, conversion factors, energy balances, etc. In addition, a Workshop on Energy Data Collection and Processing was held in Antigua and Barbuda in October 1984. Participants from member countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) discussed energy data requirements for energy planning and methods of data collection and processing with a focus on energy balances. The Statistical Office presented a paper entitled "Accounting units and conversion factors for energy statistics and energy balances".

16. A Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics was published in October 1984. Arrangements are being pursued to co-operate with the Environment and Policy Institute of the East-West Centre, Honolulu, to hold a seminar on environment statistics in February 1985. The objectives of the seminar are to share national and international experiences on the development, implementation and use of environment statistics and to lay the foundation for a national programme of statistical data collection and dissemination in the region.

Agenda item 8. Demographic and social statistics

(a) Social indicators and the integration of social, demographic and related statistics

17. Continued consultations took place with the regional commissions and a number of interested specialized agencies and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to ensure that international work on social indicators was as responsive as possible to user needs, on the one hand, and took into account the substantive concerns of the various specialized fields of statistics, on the other hand.

(b) Population and housing censuses

18. The review of national population and housing census experience in the period 1975-1984 continued. The 1983 edition of the United Nations Demographic Yearbook (in press) presents results from as many national censuses as are now available. At the same time, the process of compiling related information concerning census methods and procedures is well under way. In connection with preparatory activities for the 1990 World Population and Housing Census Programme, consultations have already been held with several of the concerned specialized agencies, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and several bilateral organizations working in technical co-operation in statistics to ensure that the substantive preparations and other arrangements for the 1990 census decade are initiated in a timely and co-ordinated manner.

Agenda item 9. Technical co-operation

(b) Development of country capabilities: the National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP)

19. Since September 1984, two more countries have joined the National Household Survey Capability Programme, bringing the total number of participating countries to 22. The new countries are Mongolia and Samoa. External assistance obtained for the country programmes now stands at \$US 16 million.

20. Special attention was given during 1984 to helping the participating countries develop their data collection and processing activities on a systematic basis and build up gradually the necessary infrastructure and skills. Over 70 technical assistance and review missions were undertaken for the purpose.

21. Training of national staff received considerable attention. Nine regional training courses/workshops were held during 1984 with wide participation by middle and senior level survey personnel from member countries. Topics covered mainly related to planning, organization, analysis and use of several subject-specific household surveys. Two courses were exclusively devoted to sampling and survey methodology.

22. There has been noticeable improvement in the processing and analysis of survey results. Countries which joined the Programme before 1983 issued reports on many of the surveys they had carried out in 1982-1983.

23. A number of national seminars with joint participation of users and producers of statistics were organized to discuss the results of the surveys and several more are planned for 1985. There was encouraging progress in technical co-operation among developing countries. The regional training courses/workshops were hosted by the more statistically developed among the participating countries, with substantial technical contributions by the host countries.
