



**Economic and Social Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

E/CN.3/1987/16  
30 October 1986

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION  
Twenty-fourth session  
23 February-4 March 1987  
Item 9 (b) of the provisional agenda\*

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL STATISTICS: SOCIAL STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

Progress in work on indicators of living standards and patterns  
of consumption and co-ordination of work on social statistics  
and social indicators

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The present document has been prepared in response to requests from the Statistical Commission and the General Assembly for progress reports on indicators on special population groups and the co-ordination of social indicators and statistics, and on socio-economic indicators of living conditions and patterns of consumption. Section I.A summarizes relevant current work of the United Nations Secretariat and selected national and international activities pertaining to indicators of living conditions and levels of living (paras. 3-17). Section I.B summarizes the current situation concerning development and dissemination of indicators on household income, consumption, patterns of consumption and poverty (paras. 18-21). In spite of considerable advances in statistical methodology and development of household survey programmes in this field in the past decade, the availability of indicators at the national level on levels of living, patterns of consumption and poverty is still mainly confined to developed countries. At the international level, there is no current programme for the compilation and dissemination of statistics and indicators on household consumption and expenditure, patterns of consumption and poverty.

\* E/CN.3/1987/1.

Section II.A summarizes the current work and outputs in international compilation and dissemination of social statistics and indicators and arrangements for their co-ordination (paras. 22-23). Section II.B summarizes current programmes in the United Nations system on social indicators for special population groups and various international strategies and events (paras. 24-41). Considerable progress has been made in the development and compilation of indicators on women, youth, children and disabled persons, on Health for All by the Year 2000 and on agrarian reform and rural development, but numerous serious problems of basic concepts and methodology, data gaps and co-ordination remain.

Points for discussions by the Commission are given in section III (paras. 42-43).

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The present report has been prepared in response to requests of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-third session and the General Assembly at its fortieth session. At its twenty-third session, the Commission requested that work on social indicators continue as part of the overall programme of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat in social statistics, with highest priority to the development of concepts and methods for statistics and indicators on special population groups, 1/ and agreed that the progress report on the subject, concentrating on co-ordination issues, should be submitted to it at its twenty-fourth session. 2/ In its resolution 40/179 of 17 December 1985, the General Assembly considered that an accurate assessment of the advances in living standards required "a reliable measuring instrument consisting of a set of indicators related to living conditions, employment and the circumstances underlying them, and the improvement of basic national statistical programmes and capabilities related to food, clothing, housing, education, health care and necessary social services", and noted "the importance of identifying, for national use, indicative patterns of consumption that adequately meet fundamental socio-economic needs and are tailored to local and national requirements, particularly in developing countries, taking into account national experience, plans and strategies"; the Assembly then requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on patterns of consumption and related socio-economic indicators, to be submitted to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fourth session for consideration, and requested the Economic and Social Council to report thereon to the Assembly at its forty-second session. Inasmuch as the requests of the General Assembly and the Statistical Commission are closely related to the ongoing programme of work of the United Nations Secretariat on integrated social statistics and indicators, it is desirable to respond to them in a single report. The present report has been prepared for this purpose.

### I. INDICATORS ON LIVING CONDITIONS AND PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION

2. The General Assembly, in its resolution 40/179, states that an accurate assessment of the advances in living standards requires a set of indicators on living conditions, employment and the circumstances underlying them, including the areas of food, housing, clothing, education, health care and necessary social services, and identification of indicative patterns of consumption that adequately meet fundamental socio-economic needs and are tailored to local and national requirements, particularly in developing countries and covering different population groups. In addition, the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination of the Statistical Commission requested that indicators of poverty be considered in the report to the Commission. 3/ Progress of work in these areas is reviewed below.

A. Living conditions and levels of living

1. United Nations Secretariat

3. United Nations work on indicators of living conditions and levels of living was initiated in 1954, when the Secretary-General convened a Committee of Experts on the International Definition and Measurement of Standards and Levels of Living. After extensive discussion in the United Nations system of the Committee's report and recommendations, the publication International Definition and Measurement of Levels of Living: An Interim Guide was issued in 1961 as a joint undertaking of the United Nations, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). 4/ In general, the Interim Guide followed the recommendations of the Committee in proposing indicators for each component of levels of living (now commonly called fields or areas of social concern), as well as several general indicators not related to a particular component and basic information in three fields closely related to, but not direct measures of, levels of living, as follows: (a) components: health, food consumption and nutrition, education, employment and conditions of work, housing, social security, 5/ clothing, 5/ recreation and entertainment, 5/ human freedoms; 5/ (b) general indicators of levels of living; 5/ (c) basic information: population and labour force, income and expenditure, communications and transportation.

4. Work on indicators of levels of living was taken up again by the United Nations Secretariat and the Statistical Commission in the late 1960s in connection with the development of a framework for the integration of social, demographic and related economic and other statistics. This work concentrated on methodological issues of statistical integration and development of basic statistics as well as indicators. Extensive technical work was completed in 1974 and published as a technical report, Towards a System of Social and Demographic Statistics. 6/ Following up and drawing on this detailed technical work, the Statistical Commission, at its nineteenth session in 1976, approved Social Indicators: Preliminary Guidelines and Illustrative Series 7/ for publication, and a technical report on adaptation of the framework for use in developing countries was published in 1979. 8/

5. In this work, the selection and development of social indicators is seen as an activity parallel to the development of a framework for integration and as a continuous user-oriented process closely linked to and dependent on the expansion, improvement and integration of basic social and demographic statistics and their links with related economic and other statistics. The scope of the subject-matter of social indicators in the preliminary guidelines is almost identical with the coverage of indicators in the Interim Guide, but is much more detailed.

6. Subsequent work on social indicators in the Secretariat has been mainly concerned with international co-ordination, the development of indicators for special population groups, including women, youth and disabled persons, within the framework of the preliminary guidelines, and the development of extensive technical guidance on concepts and methods for social indicators; a United Nations Handbook on Social Indicators for national and international use is to be published in 1987. The Statistical Commission has considered progress reports on social

indicators at each of its sessions since 1976 and on each occasion has emphasized the importance of international co-ordination because of the heterogeneity of sources and concepts for social indicators in the various component fields and the large number of national and international organizations interested in compiling and using indicators. The Handbook will substantially improve the technical basis for such co-ordination. A draft of the Handbook was reviewed by an Informal Meeting on Social Indicators convened by the Conference of European Statisticians of the Economic Commission for Europe at Stockholm from 9 to 11 April 1986. 9/ This draft has been circulated to other national statistical offices in developed and developing countries and to international organizations for comment prior to final revision for publication. The fields (components), sub-fields and principal illustrative series for social indicators covered by the draft Handbook are shown in table 1. The organization of fields and sub-fields is based on the preliminary guidelines but incorporates certain minor modifications to take more recent international work into account. The final version (now in preparation) will incorporate in particular further consideration of indicators for developing and least developed countries.

7. It is important to note that the illustrative series shown in table 1 cannot be compiled on a reliable basis except by drawing on sound bodies of underlying basic statistics. The most important of these sources for indicators are population and housing censuses, civil registration of births and deaths, household sample surveys, including appropriate demographic surveys and surveys of farm households, and the basic data and estimates used in the national accounts. However, it must also be noted that the availability of a considerable volume of basic data by no means ensures the ready availability to users of indicators relevant to special population groups, policy objectives or social concerns, in the absence of close collaboration between users and producers of indicators and detailed attention to data requirements for indicators at the stage of designing data collection programmes. Statistical harmonization and integration among various sources present major problems in the development of indicators and hence are major concerns of the work of the United Nations Secretariat in this field and of international co-ordination. International co-ordination is discussed in section II below. Technical issues of harmonization and integration are beyond the scope of the present report but are discussed in the Handbook.

8. The principal objectives of the Handbook on Social Indicators are to present a conceptual and practical framework that countries and international organizations can use in developing social indicators. The major issues addressed are the purposes of indicators, the scope and organization of subject-matter, appropriate and available sources of data, and how and what indicators can efficiently be compiled from them. Two overriding concerns which affect every aspect of work on indicators are (a) the relevance and suitability of indicators ultimately produced to specific uses and interpretations, and (b) practicality. Sorting out these issues calls for intensive dialogue among producers and users at every stage of work on indicators in order to create a common ground between the language and experience of the statistician, the often very different language and experience of specialists in substantive fields and the proverbial common sense and everyday language and experience of the public and of policy generalists, such as legislators and high-level policy appointees. The Handbook is intended to assist in this process.

Table 1. Fields, topics and selected illustrative series  
for indicators from the draft United Nations  
Handbook on Social Indicators a/

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A. Population b/

1. Size and structure of the population by age and sex
  - (a) Size of population and number and percentage distribution by age and sex
2. Population by national or ethnic group
  - (a) Number and percentage distribution by national or ethnic group, national and major regions
3. Population growth by age and sex and components of population growth - births, deaths and international migration
  - (a) Total fertility rate by age, national and major regions or urban and rural
  - (b) Annual rates of change for each age group and national or ethnic group, major regions and total population
  - (c) Rates of international immigration and net international migration by age, sex and national or ethnic group

B. Housing and human settlements and geographical  
distribution of population b/, c/

1. Geographical distribution of population and changes in distribution
  - (a) Total and percentage distribution of population: urban, rural and major cities; national level and for each major region
2. Land use
  - (a) Total and percentage distribution by type of land use
  - (b) Total surface area per capita and forest land per capita
  - (c) Agricultural land per rural inhabitant and per agricultural worker
3. Stock of housing and additions to stock
  - (a) Number and percentage distribution of conventional and marginal housing units, and ratio to number of population and households in conventional and marginal units: urban, rural and major cities

Table 1 (continued)

- (b) Number and percentage distribution of population in conventional and marginal housing, and homeless: urban, rural and major cities
  - (c) Average number of rooms or surface area per housing unit, and average number of persons per room or area per person, conventional and marginal housing: urban, rural and major cities
  - (d) Conventional dwellings constructed annually, number and rate per 1,000 existing housing units (gross rate of increase): national and urban or urban and major cities only
4. Tenure and expenditure on housing
- (a) Percentage of housing units and population in housing units for urban, rural and large cities:
    - Owner-occupied
    - Illegally occupied ("squatters")
  - (b) Gross rent, fuel and power: total, per capita and per household; as percentage of total household income and GDP; percentage received in kind (or imputed); urban, rural and/or major cities
5. Household water and sanitation
- (a) Number and percentage of housing units and population in housing units without piped water inside, piped water inside or outside, toilet inside, toilet outside, no sanitation facilities: urban, rural and major cities
6. Household energy consumption
- (a) Percentage of housing units and population in housing units without electric lighting: urban, rural and/or major cities
  - (b) Percentages of housing units and population in housing units without piped water, sanitation facilities inside or outside or electric lighting: urban, rural and major cities
  - (c) Total and per capita consumption of:
    - Petroleum products and gases
    - Electricity
    - Traditional fuels (by weight and energy output)
    - Total (joules)
7. Personal transportation
- (a) Number and ratio of passenger cars per 1,000 population



Table 1 (continued)

8. Climate

(a) For principal monitoring station(s):

Average annual precipitation, historical and each of last 5 years  
Months and levels of highest and lowest average temperature  
Historical and latest year  
Latitude

C. Family formation, families and households

1. Household size and composition

(a) Percentage distribution of population over and under age 15 in households by size, and of households with children under age 15 by male and female heads, and average size: urban and rural

2. Family status - family formation and dissolution

(a) Number and percentage of persons not currently married: age and sex, urban and rural

D. Health, health services and nutrition b/

1. Health status - mortality and morbidity

(a) Number and rates of death: sex, age, urban, rural, cause

(b) Expectation of years of life: selected ages, sex

(c) Number and/or incidence of selected communicable diseases of public health importance: sex, age, urban, rural and/or major cities

(d) Number and proportion of persons with selected chronic diseases: sex, age, urban and rural

(e) Average number of bed-days per person per year from short-term morbidity: sex, age, urban and rural

2. Impairment and disability

(a) Number and proportion of persons with selected impairments and disabilities, sex, age, cause, urban, rural

3. Health services and resources

(a) Number and rate per 1,000 population of physicians and trained health personnel by geographical area

Table 1 (continued)

- (b) Number and percentage of labour force in health services; percentage of births with trained attendants: urban/rural and/or major cities
- (c) Immunization against specified diseases: age, sex, urban/rural and/or major cities
- (d) Contraceptive use: age, urban and rural
- (e) Percentage of GDP for health services: total, and government and private separately
- (f) Total, per capita total and household consumption expenditures on health services

4. Nutrition

- (a) Food supplies and consumption; malnutrition:
  - (i) Per capita supply of calories and protein
  - (ii) Per capita supply as a percentage of minimum per capita requirements
  - (iii) Percentage of population consuming below minimum per capita requirements: age, sex, urban, rural and/or major cities
  - (iv) Net food imports as a percentage of total food consumption
  - (v) Low and high weight for age: age, sex, urban and rural

5. Consumption of alcohol and tobacco

- (a) Per capita production and consumption of alcohol, tobacco
- (b) Percentage of population not currently smoking: age, sex

E. Learning and educational services b/

1. Educational attainment and illiteracy

- (a) Number and percentage of illiterates: sex, age, urban, rural (socio-economic group, national or ethnic group)
- (b) Years or levels of schooling completed: sex, age, urban, rural (national or ethnic group, socio-economic group)

2. Enrolment and retention

- (a) Number and proportion enrolled in regular education by level and field: sex, age, major cities, geographical area

Table 1 (continued)

- (b) Number and proportion of enrollees who successfully complete each level: sex, field (at third level), socio-economic group, geographical area (first and second levels), national or ethnic origin
- 3. Adult education and training
    - (a) Number and proportion of population completing formal adult education programmes of specified length: sex, age, major cities, level and field of education, occupation, institutional sector
  - 4. Educational personnel and expenditures
    - (a) Government final consumption expenditures on education: current and constant prices, level of education, total, per capita and per student
    - (b) Private consumption expenditures on education: current and constant prices, urban, rural, socio-economic group, total and per capita

F. Economic activity and the economically inactive b/

- 1. Economically active population and the economically inactive
  - (a) Number and rates of labour force participation: sex, age, urban and rural, branch of economic activity, occupation, status in employment
  - (b) Annual rate of growth of labour force: sex, age, urban and rural, branch of economic activity, occupation
  - (c) Number and proportion of population not in the labour force: sex, age, urban and rural, activity status
- 2. Employment and unemployment
  - (a) Number and proportion of labour force employed, unemployed and underemployed: sex, age, urban and rural, major cities or areas
- 3. Employment earnings rates
  - (a) Total and per employee wage and salary rates in current and constant prices, for specified periods: sex, age, major cities or areas, branch of economic activity or occupation
- 4. Working conditions and training
  - (a) Average hours worked per week: full-time and all employees, sex, branch of economic activity
  - (b) Occupational deaths per 100,000 employees per year: sex, branch of economic activity

Table 1 (continued)

- (c) Number and proportion of employees completing formal employer adult education training programmes of specified length: sex, age, field of education, occupation or branch of economic activity

G. Socio-economic groups and social mobility

1. Socio-economic groups and changes over time
  - (a) Percentage distribution of number of households and persons according to socio-economic group, urban and rural, national or ethnic origin
  - (b) Decennial percentage changes in size and percentage distribution of socio-economic groups, urban and rural

H. Income, consumption and wealth b/, d/

1. Level, growth and composition of household income
  - (a) Total available household income per household, per person and per capita, urban and rural, level of education, type of household, socio-economic group
  - (b) Percentage of total available household income from agricultural and related activities: rural, type of household, socio-economic group
2. Level, growth and composition of consumption
  - (a) Final consumption expenditure of households, total and selected categories of goods and services, per household and per capita, urban and rural, percentile groups of households according to total household income, socio-economic groups
  - (b) Total consumption of the population per household and per capita, total and selected categories of goods and services, urban and rural, percentile groups of households according to total household income
  - (c) Percentage of consumption produced on own-account, urban and rural, socio-economic group
3. Distribution of income and consumption
  - (a) Current transfers and other benefits, urban, rural:  
  
Payments per household and per capita  
Receipts per household and per capita  
Net per household and per capita

Table 1 (continued)

- (b) Percentile distributions and measures of inequality: total household income, total available household income and/or final consumption expenditures of households, urban and rural
- (c) Percentages of households with total available household income and/or final consumption expenditure below a specified poverty line: urban and rural, type of household, socio-economic group

I. Social security and welfare services

- 1. Use and magnitude of protection against loss of income
  - (a) Total and per capita expenditures for social insurance, disaster relief, social assistance and similar benefits, institutional sector

J. Leisure, culture and communications e/

- 1. Use of leisure time
  - (a) Proportion of persons devoting time to, and average percentage (or amount) of their time spent on social and cultural activities: sex, age, urban and rural
- 2. Leisure and cultural activities and facilities
  - (a) Recreational land in built-up areas as a percentage of all land in built-up areas and in specific cities, and per capita of urban population, and of populations of major cities
  - (b) Number of seats and admissions in cinema, performing arts and sports facilities and ratios per 1,000 population: urban and rural or major cities
  - (c) Number, frequency distribution and per capita rate of newspaper and magazine circulation in the population
  - (d) Proportion of households with selected leisure and cultural durable goods, urban and rural
  - (e) Number of persons in selected leisure and cultural occupations
- 3. Communications
  - (a) Proportion of households with telephone service in their housing units

Table 1 (continued)

K. Public order and safety

1. Frequency and severity of offences and victimization
  - (a) Number of selected offences and rates per capita, urban, rural or major cities
  - (b) Number of human victims injured or killed and rates: sex, age, urban, rural or major cities
2. Characteristics and treatment of offenders
  - (a) Number of inmates in correctional institutions and their proportion in the population: sex, age
3. Institutions, personnel and performance
  - (a) Number and proportion of population engaged in public order and safety activities: urban, rural, and major cities; public and private

L. Other fields to be considered f/

1. Natural environment
  2. Social relationships
  3. Political activities
- 

a/ This material from the draft Handbook is currently being revised on the basis of comments from national and international statistical services and other interested specialists. In particular, illustrative series suitable for use in developing and least developed countries will be identified in the final version.

b/ This field is recommended as a major field of social concern for developing countries in the United Nations framework for the integration of social, demographic and related economic statistics.

c/ The scope of this field has been expanded to take into account recent work in the Statistical Office on the development of statistics on human settlements.

d/ All series should be given in current and constant prices, to the extent possible.

e/ Communications has been added to this field to reflect recent work of UNESCO.

f/ Fields for further work recommended by the Informal Meeting on Social Indicators, convened by the Conference of European Statisticians (Stockholm, 9-11 April 1986).

9. For example, many potential users of indicators lack the training and information needed to specify clearly the indicators required for specific purposes and to use them effectively. Users and producers may lack a common framework and vocabulary for indicators as a basis for co-operation and communication. A second potential use of the Handbook in both developed and developing countries is to provide a common international framework for indicators where producers and users of indicators at the national level wish to develop international comparisons. A central feature of the Handbook is to illustrate appropriate indicators in all fields of social concern based on existing international statistical guidelines and present and potential availability of data.

10. The issue of international comparability points towards another set of uses and users - international organizations in connection with programmes mandated by intergovernmental bodies. As discussed in section II below, international programmes of various kinds are increasingly calling for the compilation of indicators on the basis of specific intergovernmental mandates. These programmes are strongly oriented towards multidisciplinary issues concerning levels of living and socio-economic development. The Handbook attempts to consolidate international statistical experience and indicator requirements within a single framework so that international organizations can avoid overlapping or inconsistent data requests to countries, use the available data effectively, and develop new data requests where necessary in a practical and co-ordinated fashion.

11. Finally, Governments are strongly committed in their policy and programme objectives to improving levels of living, social development and equity in their countries. As experience in developing appropriate indicators for monitoring these objectives is still relatively limited in many countries, the Handbook is intended to provide examples of feasible and sound methods for undertaking such work.

## 2. United Nations system

12. Work in the United Nations system concerned with the development of indicators in specific fields is considered in the draft Handbook and has been discussed in previous progress reports on social indicators considered by the Statistical Commission. Programmes for statistics and other indicators on special population groups and for monitoring and assessing activities are considered in section II below. General programmes concerned with statistical concepts and methods for measuring and analysing levels of living and patterns of consumption in the context of socio-economic development have been conducted for some years by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and the World Bank. Progress in the World Bank's Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) has been reviewed periodically by the Statistical Commission. The results of the first national household survey conducted in collaboration with LSMS are now being issued and analysed. 10/

13. Relevant studies carried out by UNRISD have involved work on evaluation and selection of indicators for use in development analysis on the basis of explicit criteria and tests; screening of data on selected indicators; construction of a methodology for analysis of development data (alternative to conventional methods) and the application of this methodology; the question of measurement of distribution of wealth and income within countries; the question of relatively

rapid and low-cost methods of assessment where standard statistical information is lacking and unlikely to be readily forthcoming; field research on measurement and analysis of progress at the local level, including construction and use of indicators appropriate to that level (in a given context); the building up of a development monitoring service, beginning at the local level.

14. UNRISD work relevant to General Assembly resolution 40/179 has a strong methodological orientation in the treatment of data, in the building up of new methods of analysis and in the experimental attempt to establish a development monitoring service, with a view to practical application in the field of measurement and analysis of socio-economic development. Two recent publications of the Institute illustrate these observations: (a) Measurement and Analysis of Socio-economic Development: An Enquiry into International Indicators of Development and Quantitative Interrelations of Social and Economic Components of Development 11/ and (b) A Development Monitoring Service at the Local Level, vol. III, Monitoring Change in Kerala: The First Five Years. 12/

15. Because of the interest of the General Assembly in measuring levels of living and patterns of consumption, the Secretariat is giving high priority to taking the findings of the UNRISD and World Bank projects into account in completing work on the Handbook on Social Indicators.

### 3. National experience

16. Since the preliminary guidelines on social indicators were issued, general progress reports on national and international work on indicators submitted to the Statistical Commission every two years have noted apparently divergent trends in national work on indicators. Only about 10 developing countries issue reports on social indicators on a regular basis. Among the developed countries, most of the Western European countries issue such reports regularly, but the United States of America and Canada have discontinued their programmes. Many of the Eastern European countries issue reports regularly, following the recommendations of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. The strongest commitment to social indicator reporting on a regional basis appears to be in Europe, but in Asia, the statistical services of Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan and the Republic of Korea have also strongly supported work on social indicators. In Africa, there is a degree of regional interest but relatively few countries have actually produced publications on indicators. In the Americas (both northern and southern), the wide interest in general social indicator work demonstrated in the 1970s appears to have largely dissipated.

17. At the international level, there has been a tremendous increase in interest in indicators mainly in connection with special population groups and international activities and events, including the United Nations Decade for Women, the International Year of Disabled Persons, Health for All by the Year 2000, and the Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in 1979. These programmes contain a number of explicit and implicit directives for the development of indicators and hence have stimulated a considerable amount of work on indicators and on international reporting systems, as discussed in section II.B below. They have also stimulated national work in these specific areas.



B. Economic indicators on income, consumption, patterns of consumption and poverty

18. Economic statistics and indicators on household income, consumption and patterns of consumption (i.e., measures using monetary units) are included in the United Nations framework for the integration of social, demographic and related statistics, in the preliminary guidelines on social indicators and in the draft Handbook on Social Indicators, even though both the original United Nations levels of living studies and the social indicators programme of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development considered them as instrumental rather than integral elements or components of levels of living or well-being. In United Nations work, economic measurement is considered a useful complementary approach to levels of living indicators based on components such as health and housing. Economic measurement based on a monetary scale can provide a wide range of series which use a common unit and have important applications in programme management and policy-making. Such monetary measurement is also considered the only feasible way of calculating an overall measure of poverty.

19. In the development of economic indicators of income, consumption, patterns of consumption and poverty, there are several complex problems that have severely limited the availability and usefulness of these series at the international level and to a lesser extent at the national level. 13/ These include:

(a) Limitations of data availability and coverage, particularly in many developing countries;

(b) Difficulties in standardizing such key definitions as the household income unit and income itself within countries, and the near-impossibility of doing so among more than a very few countries at similar levels of development and with extensive data;

(c) The arbitrary nature of a poverty line, particularly in rural areas of developing countries, and the greater need in developing countries to take non-monetary measures into account in establishing such a line;

(d) The well-known problems of comparing income measures across countries in terms of purchasing power;

(e) Conceptual uncertainties inherent in the treatment of many taxes, other transfers, benefits and income, production and consumption in kind, and the great variety of economic and social arrangements concerning these income components within and among countries;

(f) The variety of measures of inequality that can be used and the lack of theoretical agreement on which are most appropriate.

20. Strengths and limitations of the economic measurement of welfare (or well-being) and alternative approaches are analysed in a study published by the United Nations in 1977, The Feasibility of Welfare-oriented Measures to Supplement the National Accounts and Balances: Technical Report, 14/ and some statistical applications in specific fields are reviewed in a United Nations technical report, Concepts and Methods for Integrating Social and Economic Statistics on Health,

Education and Housing: A Technical Report. 15/ The derivation of indicators drawing on the System of National Accounts, the System of Balances of the National Economy and the Provisional Guidelines on Statistics of the Distribution of Income, Consumption and Accumulation of Households 16/ is considered in detail in the draft Handbook. Work on the household sector in the System of National Accounts and the System of Balances of the National Economy is reviewed in reports before the Commission at its present session.

21. In the past two decades, considerable advances have been made in statistical concepts and methods for economic indicators of income, consumption and poverty. With regard to the international compilation of income statistics, ILO published Household Income and Expenditure Statistics, 1968-1976 in 1979, and the United Nations published the first issue of National Accounts Statistics: Compendium of Income Distribution Statistics in 1985. 17/ The latter publication is to be issued every three to four years. Income distribution data were also published by the United Nations in the Compendium of Social Statistics: 1977 18/ and in a special study by FAO in 1983, 19/ and are published for a limited number of countries by the World Bank in its annual World Development Report. With regard to the international compilation of statistics on household expenditure, consumption, patterns of consumption and poverty, there is no international programme at present for the regular compilation of these statistics. ILO discontinued its work in this area following the publication of Household Income and Expenditure Statistics; it is hoped, however, that this work will be resumed in 1988/89. A regional research programme on poverty measurement was completed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in the early 1980s but has not been renewed. 20/

## II. CO-ORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL WORK ON SOCIAL STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

### A. Primary international compilation and dissemination

22. Within the overall framework of extensive and long-standing arrangements for the co-ordination of international statistical work at policy and technical levels, primary responsibilities for the international collection, compilation and dissemination of social statistics are basically decentralized by subject-matter in international statistical services. The offices primarily concerned with data collection from countries and dissemination in the social fields are the statistical services of the United Nations Secretariat (which includes the Statistical Office of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs and the statistical offices of the regional commissions) and of ILO, FAO, UNESCO and WHO. In addition, the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat prepares demographic estimates and projections and special studies using national and international data sources. However, none of these organizations collects data directly from countries on a regular basis. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank compile and disseminate a number of social statistics series, mainly based on various international sources.

23. The major statistical publications of the United Nations system that contain statistics on social issues are listed in table 2. The specialized compilations in part A of the table are listed according to the fields of social concern adopted by the Statistical Commission for work on social indicators and on the framework for the integration of social, demographic and related statistics. The Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and several of the specialized agencies also issue general compendiums of statistics that cover the social fields to varying degrees (see table 2, part B). Primary sources for certain economic statistics that are also important for socio-economic studies, mainly statistics of household income and consumption and of government expenditure in the social fields, are listed in part C of the table.

Table 2. International collection and dissemination of social statistics in statistical publications

Fields of social concern	Publication and frequency <u>a/</u>	Issuing organization
	<u>A. Specialized compilations</u>	
Population, families and households	Demographic Yearbook Population and Vital Statistics Report (quarterly) World Population Prospects (biennial) World Population Trends and Policies: Monitoring Report, vol. I, Population Trends (biennial) <u>Ad hoc studies</u>	United Nations Secretariat
Housing and human settlements	Compendium of Human Settlements Statistics (quinquennial)	United Nations Secretariat
Health, health services and nutrition <u>b/</u>	World Health Statistics Annual and World Health Statistics Report Food-balance sheets (decennial and as available) Reports on World Census of Agriculture (decennial and as available) Review of Food Consumption Surveys (periodical and as available) World Food Survey (quinquennial)	WHO  FAO
Learning and educational services <u>b/</u>	Statistical Yearbook <u>Ad hoc studies</u>	UNESCO

Table 2 (continued)

Fields of social concern	Publication and frequency <u>a/</u>	Issuing organization
Earning activities <u>b/</u>	Yearbook of Labour Statistics Bulletin of Labour Statistics (quarterly) Labour Force Estimates and Projections (decennial)	ILO
Income and consumption	<u>Ad hoc</u> studies	United Nations Secretariat ILO FAO
Social security and welfare services	Cost of Social Security (quinquennial)	ILO
Public order and safety	Data collected quinquennially and incorporated in reports for United Nations Congresses on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders	United Nations Secretariat
Leisure, culture and communications	Statistical Yearbook <u>Ad hoc</u> studies	UNESCO
Socio-economic groups and mobility	No international data collection	
<b>B. <u>Multi-subject compilations</u></b>		
	Statistical Yearbook Monthly Bulletin of Statistics World Statistics in Brief (annual) Compendium of Social Statistics (quinquennial) Regional yearbooks	United Nations Secretariat  Regional commissions (except ECE)
	World Tables, vol. II, Social Data (every 3-5 years) World Development Report, annex (annual)	World Bank

Table 2 (continued)

Fields of social concern	Publication and frequency <u>a/</u>	Issuing organization
	Statistics on Children in UNICEF countries (annual) World Statistics on Children (annual)	UNICEF
<u>C. Economic statistics</u>		
	National Accounts Statistics (annual)	United Nations Secretariat
	Government Finance Statistics (annual)	International Monetary Fund

a/ Frequency of publication may vary.

b/ Statistics relevant to this topic from national demographic sources, such as population censuses and vital statistics, are also published in the Demographic Yearbook.

B. Statistics and indicators on special population groups and for monitoring international strategies and events

1. New demands for integrated indicators

24. In recent years extensive new demands for social statistics and indicators have emerged in connection with special population groups and international events and strategies. These new demands have raised issues of statistical co-ordination for several reasons:

(a) In the context of the integrated approach to development emphasized in various international forums, the indicators sought are multi-subject and cut across the traditional allocation of subject-matter responsibilities in the United Nations system;

(b) In some cases, specific statistical requirements are written into programmes and plans of action with little attention to their statistical implications and without taking account of existing arrangements for statistical co-ordination and development. Overlapping and inconsistent requests to countries for indicators may be made owing to differing interpretations of these mandates by the various secretariats, the lack of an agreed list of socio-economic indicators at the international level, and different definitions of indicators used at the national level;

(c) Statistical concepts and methods in many of the social and related economic fields are rapidly evolving. Considerable time is required to test and implement new methods;

(d) In the social fields, apart from population, there is no systematic mechanism for co-ordinating estimates and projections and there are many examples, even in the field of population, where inconsistent estimates of key series are issued by various offices. Many estimates are based on highly speculative or unreliable primary data and may be inappropriate conceptually for the uses to which they are put. To some extent a circular process is evident: lack of basic data at the national level gives rise to ad hoc and poorly founded estimates at the international level, and the wide dissemination of these estimates creates the impression that the lack of data is much less serious than it is.

25. The Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), at its sixteenth session in 1982, requested the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat to prepare a consolidated report on requests for socio-economic indicators for current and forthcoming international strategies. In response to that request, the Statistical Office identified 12 intergovernmental activities that have explicitly noted the importance of developing socio-economic indicators for monitoring, review and appraisal, policy-making and research. These concern the following topics: (a) special population groups - women, youth, children, disabled persons and the elderly; (b) selected interdisciplinary issues - rural development and agrarian reform, the Third United Nations Development Decade and development of the least-developed countries; and (c) particular fields of social concern - population, health, housing and water, and crime prevention and criminal justice. In considering the report prepared by the Statistical Office on this subject at its seventeenth session in 1983, the ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities agreed that further close attention to co-ordination was needed on social statistics and indicators, especially in relation to the requirements under the major international strategies and plans of action in the social fields. This topic was discussed at length at the twenty-third session of the Commission.

26. The draft Handbook on Social Indicators attempts to harmonize the experience and requirements for indicators arising from these new demands over the past decade by identifying more explicitly than in the preliminary guidelines data and indicators suitable and feasible for wide national and international use. The basic premises of United Nations work on social indicators are retained: orientation to levels of living and circumstances influencing them, use of the framework for integration for the organization of the subject-matter and maintaining close links between development of basic data and indicators.

## 2. Development of indicators on special population groups

27. The development of statistics and indicators on population groups that are considered to be of special relevance for policy planning has received high priority in many countries, in regions and at the international level. That interest has given considerable impetus to a range of activities concerned with statistics and indicators on these groups. These include:

(a) Critical review and refinement at national and international levels of concepts and methods used in collecting statistics concerning these groups and preparation of associated documentation;

(b) Implementation in countries of new data collection activities giving special attention to data on these groups;

(c) Selection and compilation of statistics and indicators on these groups at national, regional and international levels. For example, work is under way at the international level to develop automated micro-computer data bases on women and disabled persons;

(d) Training in collection, compilation and use of those statistics and indicators.

28. The principal groups on which statistical work has been concentrated at the international level are women (beginning with the World Conference of the International Women's Year in 1975), disabled persons (beginning with the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1982), youth (in connection with International Youth Year in 1985) and children (by UNICEF). There has also been interest in the development of statistics and indicators on the elderly (in connection with the World Assembly on Aging in 1982 and the International Plan of Action on Aging) and on families, but thus far only limited statistical work has been done in those fields in the United Nations system.

(a) Statistics and indicators on the situation of women

29. The development of statistics and indicators specifically concerned with the situation of women was first recommended at the international level in the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year, adopted by the World Conference of the International Women's Year in 1975. That recommendation was followed by Economic and Social Council resolutions 2061 (LXII) of 12 May 1977 and 1981/11 of 6 May 1981, and was reaffirmed and elaborated in the Programme of Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women, adopted by the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace in 1980. Further impetus and elaboration has been provided by the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women adopted in 1985.

30. Further to those recommendations, a joint programme of work on improving statistics and indicators on the situation of women was initiated in 1982 by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the Statistical Office, in co-operation with the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. An expert group meeting on this subject was convened by the Secretariat and the Institute in 1983 and two technical reports were subsequently published.

31. Further work on concepts and methods has been undertaken by INSTRAW and the Statistical Office concerning measurement and valuation of women's participation in

non-monetary productive activities, measurement of women's income and the use of household surveys to collect statistics on the situation of women. INSTRAW and the Statistical Office, in co-operation with ECLAC, are co-organizing an expert group meeting on measurement of women's income and their participation in production in the informal sector, to be held at Santo Domingo from 13 to 17 October 1986.

32. Concerning international compilation and dissemination of indicators on women, a substantial quantity of data is being routinely collected in international statistical services and supplemented, in many cases, with standardized international estimates and projections. New technologies in data-base management and dissemination and the rapid spread of micro-computers make it feasible to compile these data in one source, disseminate them to users cheaply and quickly on diskettes, and prepare prototype user-oriented software and documentation for easy reference, analysis, table-generation and similar uses. A special project with these objectives was established in the Secretariat in 1984, with extrabudgetary support, to develop a user-oriented, micro-computer data base of statistics and indicators on women. This work is to be completed in 1987 and a users' manual for the data base and an updated compilation of statistics and indicators on the situation of women is to be prepared.

33. The Statistical Office is co-operating with the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development, the regional commissions, INSTRAW and other interested bodies in the organization of national and regional training workshops for producers and users of statistics on women. Subregional workshops were held in 1985 at Harare, Zimbabwe, and Praia, Cape Verde. At least six such workshops are to be held in 1986/87. A detailed training manual for statistics and indicators on women in development is to be completed by the Statistical Office and INSTRAW in 1986, based on material reviewed by the Harare workshop, which was organized by INSTRAW, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Statistical Office.

34. Considerable progress was made during the United Nations Decade for Women in improving statistics and indicators on the situation of women. Efforts will continue in 1987-1990, pursuant to the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, to improve concepts and methods, establish more effective systems of data collection and ensure sex-disaggregated data in all relevant fields, expand the dissemination and use of the substantial data already available, and promote a dialogue between users and producers of data on needs, priorities and applications. Special emphasis will be given to income, wage, industrial and agricultural statistics, and to technical co-operation for producers and users of statistics on women at the national level in the areas of household surveys and training.

(b) United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992) and World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons

35. The World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons emphasizes the importance of developing statistics and indicators on disabled persons using national population censuses or household surveys, as appropriate and feasible. The Statistical Office, with the assistance of consultants, has prepared two technical reports on this subject. One focuses on conceptual and methodological issues in collecting reliable and useful data through surveys, and the other examines actual data collected on disabled persons in five countries of the Middle



East. An expert group was convened in 1984 to review these reports in draft form prior to publication. 21/

36. New work of the Secretariat in the development of statistics on disabled persons includes (a) review of statistical concepts and methods for selection and compilation of indicators, (b) technical co-operation and (c) development of a user-oriented, micro-computer data base for statistics and indicators on disabled persons, which will provide the statistical basis for a mid-Decade (1988) report on implementation of the Programme of Action. Thus far, statistical reports and tabulations containing disability data have been collected for about 80 developing and developed countries, and these data are being compiled in a standard form on a micro-computer.

### 3. Monitoring levels of living and socio-economic development

37. The monitoring of levels of living and socio-economic development may be considered from three different perspectives: from the aggregate national level - from the national or international point of view; from the subnational level, such as the community level or other geographical disaggregation; and from the project-oriented or programme-oriented monitoring and evaluation perspective within countries.

38. In terms of the aggregate national perspective, it is argued that for development to proceed effectively, wide participation in it and in the distribution of benefits are not only desirable objectives but prerequisites, otherwise development will either falter or be so highly inequitable as to be undesirable. Thus, extensive programmes for monitoring various aspects of trends and levels of socio-economic development and well-being using indicators have been developed by FAO in connection with the Programme of Action adopted in 1979 by the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, and by WHO in connection with its programme Health for All by the Year 2000. These programmes were reviewed in the report of the Secretary-General on the future direction of work on social indicators (E/CN.3/1985/3, paras. 45-56), which was considered by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-third session. The results of the 1985 evaluation reporting on Health for All by the Year 2000 are to be issued by WHO in 1986 in a document entitled "Evaluation of the Strategy for Health for All by the Year 2000: seventh report on the world health situation". The forthcoming progress report on the Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development will be considered by the Conference of FAO at its twenty-fourth session in 1987.

39. Development of indicators for other development strategies and events was also reviewed by the Commission at its twenty-third session on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General on the future direction of work (E/CN.3/1985/3, paras. 57-58) and the related report of the Secretary-General on progress in the development of social indicators and the integration of social, demographic and related statistics (E/CN.3/1985/11, paras. 18-21).

40. From the point of view of subnational data, national experiences and priorities differ widely, but in nearly all countries it appears that some significant work has been done on regional (within-country) indicators and comparisons in connection with the distribution of national government resources. However, no systematic international work on that application of indicators has been undertaken.

41. Another area in which there has been considerable national and international interest is the potential use of social indicators and statistics in programme and project planning, monitoring and evaluation. For example, internationally supported projects often entail substantial expenditures for the compilation and analysis of data in impact areas at planning, implementation and evaluation stages. The extent to which data and indicators from national statistical services are or could be used has not been systematically assessed nor the methodology analysed from the point of view of linking this activity to ongoing national statistical development. Some of the methodological difficulties were noted in the preliminary guidelines on social indicators. However, given the considerable demand for, and the investment currently being made in, statistics for planning and evaluation, there may be scope for examining the potential role of indicators in promoting consistency and eliminating duplication between statistical services and project, programme and evaluation activities.

### III. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

42. The Commission discussed the future direction of work on social indicators and the integration of social, demographic and related statistics as a special issue at its twenty-third session. The Commission may therefore wish to limit its discussion at the present session to principal ongoing issues and major new developments. Specifically, it may wish to:

(a) Recommend continuation of the work programme on development of concepts and methods for social statistics and indicators, the highest priority being given to the development of statistics and indicators on special population groups and to international co-ordination;

(b) Re-emphasize its commitment to the co-ordinated development and utilization of a wide range of basic statistics programmes for social indicators within the framework for the integration of social, demographic and related statistics;

(c) Recommend wide distribution of the list of fields, topics and selected illustrative series for indicators contained in the United Nations Handbook of Social Indicators (see table 1) for use as appropriate by national and international statistical services and other interested institutions;

(d) Recommend adding a review of indicators on the natural environment to the Handbook of Social Indicators, as proposed by the Conference of European Statisticians at its Informal Meeting on Social Indicators;

(e) Request the Secretary-General to report to the Commission at its twenty-fifth session on international co-ordination of social statistics and indicators and development of statistics and indicators on special population groups, including a review of indicators used for monitoring implementation and achievement of objectives in intergovernmental programmes set forth in international strategies and events;

43. With respect to the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 40/179 for a review of indicators related to living conditions and patterns of consumption that adequately meet fundamental socio-economic needs, particularly taking developing country circumstances into account, the Commission may wish to:

(a) Endorse the work described in the present report, including the work of UNRISD, the World Bank Living Standards Measurement Study and the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, which provides a review of indicators and data collection methods appropriate to the needs expressed by the General Assembly with respect to measuring living conditions, employment and the circumstances underlying them;

(b) Draw the attention of the Economic and Social Council to the list of fields, topics and selected illustrative series for indicators to be issued in the Handbook on Social Indicators as an indicative basis for selecting and compiling indicators, depending on specific national and international requirements;

(c) Draw the attention of the Economic and Social Council to the serious continuing need in developing and least-developed countries for development and support of basic data collection programmes if the demand for the indicators on patterns of consumption related to fundamental socio-economic needs is to be met;

(d) Recommend that the Economic and Social Council give the highest priority, within the available resources of the statistics programme of the United Nations to co-ordinated international work to improve concepts, methods and data collection on patterns of consumption that meet fundamental socio-economic needs, within the framework for the integration of social, demographic and related statistics and linked with the System of National Accounts and the System of Balances of the National Economy and that the Secretary-General present a review of this work to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fifth session.

#### Notes

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1985, Supplement No. 6 (E/1985/26), para. 140.

2/ Ibid., chap. I, sect. B.

3/ See "Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination: report on the eleventh session" (E/CN.3/1987/21), para. 21.

4/ United Nations publication, Sales No. 61.IV.7.

5/ At the time the Committee's report was prepared, no specific indicators in this field were considered practical; hence no recommendations were made.

Notes (continued)

6/ Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 18 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.74.XVII.8).

7/ Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 63 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.78.XVII.8).

8/ Improving Social Statistics in Developing Countries: Conceptual Framework and Methods, Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 25 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.79.XVII.12).

9/ The conclusions of the meeting are contained in CES/569.

10/ Côte d'Ivoire, Ministère de l'économie et des finances, Direction de la statistique, Enquête permanente auprès des ménages: résultats provisoires, 1985 (Abidjan, 1985).

11/ Donald McGranahan, Eduardo Pizarro and Claude Richard, Measurement and Analysis of Socio-economic Development: An Enquiry into International Indicators of Development and Quantitative Interrelations of Social and Economic Components of Development, Report No. 85 (Geneva, UNRISD, 1985).

12/ Wolf Scott and N. T. Mathew, A Development Monitoring Service at the Local Level, vol. III, Monitoring Change in Kerala: The First Five Years, Report No. 85.7 (Geneva, UNRISD and Kerala Statistical Institute, 1985). Volumes I and II, by the same authors, are entitled Socioeconomic Observations Areas in Kerala, Report No. 80.2 (Geneva, UNRISD, 1980) and Levels of Living and Poverty in Kerala, Report No. 83.2 (Geneva, UNRISD, 1983).

13/ These issues are brought out in Oscar Altimir, "Poverty in Latin America: a review of concepts and data", CEPAL Review (April 1981); FAO, "An international comparison of household income distributions: a provisional report" (ESS/Misc/83-13A); Amartya Sen, Choice, Welfare and Measurement (Oxford, Blackwell, 1982); and Stein Ringen, "Difference and similarity: two studies in comparative income distribution" (Stockholm, Institute for Social Research, 1986). Mimeo.

14/ Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 22 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.77.XVII.12).

15/ Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 40 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.86.XVII.23).

16/ Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 61 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.77.XVII.11 and corrigendum).

17/ Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 79 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.XVII.6).

18/ Statistical Papers, Series K, No. 4 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E/F.80.XVII.6).

Notes (continued)

19/ FAO "An international comparison of household income distributions: a provisional report" (ESS/Misc/83-13A).

20/ Altimir, loc. cit.

21/ The first of these reports has been issued as Development of Statistics of Disabled Persons: Case Studies, Statistics on Special Population Groups, Series Y, No. 2 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.86.XVII.17). The second is to be issued as Use of Household Surveys to Collect Statistics on Disabled Persons: A Technical Report, Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 38.

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