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TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION

Towards an assessment of the effectiveness of
technical co-operation in statistics

Report of the Secretary General

SUMMARY

The present report has been prepared in response to a request of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-third session. It contains a review of previous discussions on the matter (paras. 4-6) as well as a section on the purpose, scope and limitations of assessing the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics (paras. 7-9). Three evaluations of technical co-operation activities in statistics are presented (paras. 10-45), as examples.

The report also contains a description of plans for an in-depth country study of the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics and a more modest alternative approach (paras. 46-48) and a plan for identifying measures of national statistical capability (paras. 49-53). Points for discussion by the Commission are included (para. 54).

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Statistical Commission, at its twenty-third session, requested that a report containing an assessment of the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics should be submitted to the Commission at its twenty-fourth session. 1/
2. The Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination, at its eleventh session in 1985, reviewed alternative approaches to the problems of assessing the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics and agreed that the Statistical Office should pursue the country approach by developing a plan for that approach. The Working Group also suggested that the Statistical Office identify or develop appropriate global indicators of national statistical capability.
3. Accordingly, the present paper briefly reviews in section I previous discussions of the matter in the Statistical Commission, its Working Group and the ACC Sub-Committee in Statistical Activities. Section II contains a discussion of some of the major issues involved in an assessment of technical co-operation along the lines proposed by the Working Group of the Statistical Commission. Section III provides examples of the assessment process by summarizing three recent evaluation studies that, in whole or in part, dealt with technical co-operation in statistics. Each of the studies was carried out by one of the established evaluation mechanisms within the United Nations. The first two were carried out by the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Fund for Population Activities, respectively, and dealt with projects funded by those organizations. The third study was carried out on behalf of the Committee on Programme Co-ordination (CPC) by the Central Evaluation Unit of the United Nations Secretariat and was an in-depth evaluation of the population programme of the United Nations. As such, it covered, inter alia, technical co-operation activities in population statistics. Section IV outlines tentative plans for carrying out the comprehensive assessment recommended by the Commission's Working Group and a more modest alternative approach. Section V contains a plan for identifying a series of indicators that could be used to measure at least some aspects of statistical development.

I. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS

4. At the twenty-third session of the Statistical Commission, in 1985, the importance of assessing the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics was stressed although the difficulty of carrying out such an assessment was recognized. Commission members considered that, with the requested improvement in the detailed information for analysing the volume and contents of technical co-operation activity, it should be possible to compare more effectively the achievement of specific projects with their objectives. Those objectives could include, for example, the development of new series of statistics, the training of staff and, most important, any improvement in economic and social conditions that might to some extent be credited to the improvement in statistics. It was also emphasized that, besides examining the effectiveness of the technical co-operation

provided, the assessment should consider the priorities and the needs of the countries in question.

5. The Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), at its nineteenth session in June 1985, suggested that, since a report had to be prepared for the twenty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission and, given the timetable and resources available, some version of the more limited project assessment approach should be utilized along with an account of the experiences of the various agencies in that area. There was general agreement that the inclusion of the objective measurement of any improvement in economic and social conditions which might be credited to improvements in statistics available was most difficult. The Sub-Committee stressed the difficulty of making even the most simple impact assessments in that respect. There was also general agreement that, besides presenting an assessment based on a partial project approach, the document to the Statistical Commission should include a fairly detailed proposal and work plan with budgetary requirements, if necessary, for a more in-depth assessment on the basis of a few selected countries, with a view to submitting a report to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fifth session.

6. The Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination of the Statistical Commission, at its eleventh session in September 1985, after having reviewed alternative approaches to the problem of assessing the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics, agreed that a country approach rather than a project approach was appropriate for that type of evaluation study. Furthermore, it recommended that the Statistical Office should pursue the country approach by developing a plan incorporating that approach and should also start to carry it out within available resources and report on the progress made to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fourth session. The Working Group simultaneously recommended that the Statistical Office should identify or develop appropriate global indicators of national statistical capability and use those indicators to assess the change in capability on a global scale over a recent period of time and that the results of that work should be included in the report to the Statistical Commission, along with any relevant experience in assessment of international and national agencies.

II. PURPOSE, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION IN STATISTICS

7. Following the suggestion of the Working Group (as set out in para. 6 above), one possible approach to the assessment of the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics involves measuring the impact of technical co-operation on the statistical capability of a country. National statistical capability could be measured in terms of:

- (a) Experience in carrying out censuses or sample surveys;
- (b) The capability of the national statistical services in specified technical areas, such as data processing or sampling;

(c) The country's ability to compile important basic statistics such as national accounts;

(d) The availability, timeliness and quality of statistical data in various subject-matter fields; or

(e) The extent to which national statistical outputs are used.

The objective assessment of national statistical capabilities and outputs has long been a subject of concern and unresolved debate in countries at all levels of statistical development, and while some of the criteria are relatively easy to quantify in reasonably objective terms, others are inherently more subjective assessments. For those reasons, the proposed assessment would be necessarily somewhat exploratory in nature. During the process of an assessment exercise, it might be possible to determine the effectiveness with which resources for technical co-operation have been utilized and to assess the relevance of individual technical co-operation projects to identified problems. Such a country-oriented assessment could, in theory, explore the relationship between the utilization of technical co-operation inputs and the impact of the projects involved in terms of improved statistics and statistical capabilities. Because of a number of practical difficulties, outlined below, the results of such an assessment may not be as revealing as expected. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the results of the assessment would contribute to a better understanding of what major statistical needs remain or emerge for technical co-operation and of how to proceed more effectively in designing and implementing new technical co-operation activities in statistics in the future.

8. There is a need to take into consideration all the factors that might have affected changes in the statistical capability of any specific country over time and the impact of related technical co-operation both multilateral and bilateral. Technical co-operation activities which would have to be covered in the exercise include technical advisory services, training of national statistical staff, and the provision of equipment through country projects, regional projects and/or interregional projects.

9. It is important to point out that, in many developing countries, the most important factors affecting changes in national statistical capabilities and performance are associated with circumstances arising from outside statistical organizations. The political, administrative, financial and social situations of countries have an important role in influencing their statistical capabilities. For example, where Governments place high priority on statistical development, even with a modest level of external technical co-operation, a visible improvement in statistical capability can be achieved. On the other hand, financial difficulties in Governments may lead to a deterioration in the statistical capability of a country, despite the provision of substantial technical assistance. Another factor that often adversely affects statistical development is the drain of personnel from the statistical sector to other sectors financially more attractive to the staff concerned. Factors such as these can have a stronger influence on the statistical capability of a country than external technical co-operation, and thus complicate the issue of measuring the impact of technical co-operation. Along the same lines,

it may be noted that developed countries, while not recipients of technical co-operation, also have advances and set-backs in their statistical programmes arising from many of the same internal factors. Finally, any general conclusions about the overall effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics based on these assessments will have to take into consideration the fact that the objectives of both national statistical development efforts and technical co-operation programmes may vary from country to country and over time.

III. EXAMPLES OF EVALUATING TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION IN STATISTICS

A. Evaluation of a statistical development project funded by the United Nations Development Programme

10. A project aimed at developing the statistical services in a West Asian country became operational in October 1980, and the full-scale project document was concluded in February 1982. The operational life of the project was scheduled until the end of June 1986. The UNDP contribution to the project was approximately \$US 1.5 million. The components of the expenditure were (a) advisory services (\$US 1.2 million), (b) fellowships (\$US 200,000) and (c) equipment (\$US 100,000).

11. The Government requested an extension of the project for four more years beyond June 1986, involving additional UNDP support. It was in that context that the resident representative proposed the evaluation of the ongoing project, with a view to assessing its achievement in relation to the objectives set forth in the project document and setting forth recommendations for a future course of action.

12. The developmental objective of the project was to strengthen the technical and administrative capabilities of government organizations in order to meet the growing requirements of planned economic and social development. The project's direct contribution was specifically to focus on the strengthening of the planning process through the building of a comprehensive statistical system that should be capable of generating satisfactory information required for planning and decision-making.

13. The immediate objectives of the project were as follows:

(a) To develop and implement a reorganizational plan for the Department of Statistics, including an assessment of its staff requirements and the undertaking of a statistical training programme to meet the total government requirements;

(b) To establish and strengthen the planning and statistical capability of units in the various ministries;

(c) To develop and undertake an integrated programme of household surveys to provide data on a regular basis;

(d) To develop a system of economic statistics with the regular compilation of national accounts;

(e) To accord the highest priority to the Government's urgent data needs for development planning.

14. The evaluation mission (a two-man team sent to the country in April 1986) reported that the project had made a number of useful contributions to overall statistical development in the country. The following were identified as the major contributions of the project: compiling national accounts at current and constant prices; conducting a household agricultural survey, a survey of women's participation in economic activities and a pilot survey of household consumption; assisting in the conduct of the population census; and undertaking an on-the-job training programme.

15. However, the mission pointed out that the Department of Statistics lacked sufficient resources at the time the project was formulated and had not been significantly strengthened during the past five years. In general, there was need for organizational improvement; additional staff with adequate qualifications; significant training inputs; a systematic plan for the collection of primary data; and further improvements in current routine compilation.

16. Although useful national accounts compilations at current and constant prices have been made, the quality of estimates was not considered to be high in the absence of adequate basic data on production, price and consumption.

17. The mission found that in order to develop basic data collection and compilation systematically and on a regular basis, it would be essential for the Department of Statistics to significantly increase its resources and to obtain the necessary annual budgetary allocation and an appropriate facility for the regular training of personnel.

18. The mission noted that the Government had fully recognized the important role of statistical development and was in the process of implementing a reorganization of the National Planning Organization, in which the Department of Statistics was a major entity. That reorganization was expected to be effective in the immediate future. The reorganized Department of Statistics would have increased responsibilities and adequate co-ordination with other ministries and could be expected to have resources to undertake increased responsibilities.

19. A major deficiency noted by the mission was the inadequacy of data processing support given to the Department, which had resulted in considerable delays in the publication of the statistical abstract and the survey results. The past deficiencies were primarily due to an inadequacy in data entry facilities and to management problems. The mission was informed that, in fact, the data entry equipment had already been increased from the previous level of five to a total of 60 (initially for the population census with UNFPA assistance).

20. The mission concluded that adequate consideration was not being given to the capacity of the Department of Statistics and to the prevailing overall constraints for determining the activities and outputs of the project. Furthermore, the very significant harnessing of resources and the implementation of the organizational

and administrative actions implicit in the project design were to some degree beyond what could have been reasonably anticipated.

21. Finally, the mission recommended that, in view of the strong desire of the Government for continued UNDP assistance for statistical development during the period beginning with 1987 and, in light of the gap between the originally stated project objectives and its actual achievements, any further assistance should be provided only on the basis of a more realistic reformulation of project objectives in the light of past experience and the current overall situation.

B. Evaluation of a population census project funded by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities

22. In 1980, UNFPA agreed to contribute approximately \$US 1.2 million to support the 1983 population census of a country in Africa. Over the years, additional sums were allocated and, as of the end of 1984, the UNFPA contribution to the project had been approximately \$US 1.4 million. The components of the assistance were:

- (a) Advisory services (\$US 150,000);
- (b) Fellowships (\$US 62,000);
- (c) Equipment such as data-processing equipment and motor vehicles (\$US 1 million);
- (d) Operation and maintenance of equipment (\$US 156,000).

23. The previous census of the country was taken in 1973. A UNFPA evaluation mission concluded that the 1973 census could not be regarded as successful, to the extent that the Government itself did not accept the census results. The lack of a basic plan of operation, hasty preparatory activities, the very late arrival of United Nations experts, considerable delays in the delivery of vehicles and other vital equipment, and delays in the release of project funds by the United Nations and the Government were identified by the evaluation mission as the major factors which had inhibited the census operation. Nevertheless, the mission also concluded that the 1973 census had given invaluable practical experience to the country's statistical personnel, and with the various training opportunities that it had utilized, the local personnel so trained could be relied upon for conducting future censuses.

24. In early 1985, a UNFPA evaluation mission was sent to the country to assess the conduct of the 1983 population census project from the following perspectives:

- (a) The extent to which the immediate objectives had been achieved and the extent to which the project had contributed to the achievement of long-term objectives;
- (b) The project design and the implementation of the planned activities;

(c) The role of the Government, the executing agency (including ECA) and UNFPA, and their respective roles in the co-ordination of the management and monitoring of the project.

In addition, the mission was to compare the implementation of activities and the achievement of the objectives of the 1973 and 1983 censuses in order to ascertain the progress made in the census-taking capability of the Government and the role of UNFPA and DTCD in technical assistance. In order to compare the 1973 and 1983 experiences as systematically as possible, the mission was to assess each aspect of the 1983 census and subsequently compare it with the information available from the 1973 evaluation report.

25. The mission reported that the main activities of the project, leading up to the execution of the 1983 population census, had been successfully completed. It also reported that there was ample evidence to conclude that the 1983 census activities were more thoroughly conducted and supervised than those of 10 years before. The actual enumeration also proceeded quite smoothly throughout the country, with no major mishaps.

26. The mission observed that the success of the 1983 census was to a large extent due to the high priority accorded to it by the Government. Specifically, the National Co-ordinating Committee was chaired by the First Vice-President of the country. In addition, the Government, with the help of the army, had made a major, successful effort to provide vehicles and fuel for the field work, and the Ministry of Education had released the necessary teachers for three weeks to act as census supervisors and enumerators.

27. The 1983 census had also demonstrated weaknesses which, in the mission's view, were mainly connected with the large size of the country and with time constraints. The original work plan had provided for a preparatory period of two years and 10 months before the census date, but it had not been possible for the United Nations or the Government to begin that early. Another weakness had been the limitation of the external advisory services which had been provided exclusively by short-term missions.

28. The United Nations advisory missions to the project had begun in the second half of 1980. In the field of general census planning, there had been a short visit from an ECA technical adviser in August and another one in December. It had been reported by those advisers that the Census Office had not yet been effectively established. The first advisory visit in cartography had been made from November 1980 to January 1981, and the need for a resident adviser had been pointed out. Not until November 1981 had a United Nations mission reviewed the situation with regard to data processing.

29. The evaluation mission commented that the United Nations advisory services had begun late in terms of the approved work plan. The delay had been related to the establishment of the National Census Office, designating needed national census personnel and the requisition and delivery of equipment and supplies. The initial delays had inevitably led to other ones and, although the pace of activity had picked up considerably during 1981 and 1982, it had not been possible to carry out

all of the activities foreseen in the work plan. The pilot census and post-enumeration survey had had to be abandoned, the sample selection and delineation of enumeration areas had had to be done in a less than satisfactory manner and the data-processing facility had not been ready on time.

30. However, the mission had been satisfied that the quality of the United Nations advisory services to the project had consistently been of a high order. That had also been recognized by the Government. In spite of the late start, the level of advisory services had measured up to what had been stipulated in the project document and had been about as high as was possible for the available regional and interregional personnel. Nevertheless, the fact remained that such services could not always be given punctually when required and they had rarely been available on short notice in an emergency.

31. The evaluation mission concluded that the strategy of using only short-term advisers had been applied too early. Only one complete census had been taken in the country before, and it had not been very successful. It had been necessary to test further and adopt many aspects of census methodology in the difficult and diversified conditions prevailing in vast countries of that size. The need for resident advisers in cartography and in data processing had been recognized rather early. In addition, a general census adviser could have helped to accomplish the various preparatory activities in keeping with the scheduled plan of operations.

C. Evaluation of United Nations population-related activities
by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination

32. At its twenty-fourth session in 1984, the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) requested the Secretary-General to prepare an in-depth evaluation of the population programme of the United Nations for a review at its twenty-sixth session in 1986. The Central Evaluation Unit carried out the study in collaboration with the main substantive units concerned, and prepared and presented the final report to CPC, which considered the matter at its twenty-sixth session in May 1986. ^{2/} The recommendations of the CPC on the subject, together with the evaluation itself, are to be reviewed by the Population Commission, at its twenty-fourth session.

33. The main purpose of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the objectives of the population programme (as stated in the medium-term plan) were being met and to suggest ways of improving the relevance, effectiveness and impact of continuing recurrent and future activities within the programme. In addition to activities in research and analysis, technical co-operation projects in population, including those in population statistics, at the country level which had been completed over the 1978-1983 period were also included in the study. Thirty-two country projects had been selected from a total file index of 162 executed by the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development (DTCD) and funded by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). The sample chosen had covered all five regions and included projects executed in 29 countries. Information had been collected by means of questionnaires sent to the Governments and the UNDP resident co-ordinators or representatives and UNFPA offices in the

field. The overall response rate showed that 18 per cent of the total number of questionnaires had been returned.

1. Project implementation

34. On the question of input delivery, over 80 per cent of the respondents had indicated that the delivery of expert/consultant services had been timely, but only 65 per cent of the replies had reported the delivery of equipment to be as scheduled. Over 90 per cent of the respondents had noted that, once in place, the experts, training and equipment provided had been successfully utilized.

2. Co-ordination

35. Over half of the respondents had noted some form of co-ordination between the project under evaluation and other population projects being carried out by other United Nations agencies. The means of co-ordination most frequently mentioned had been personal contacts between project experts and other personnel and shared training programmes.

3. Relevance of project objectives

36. Sixty-five per cent of the respondents had indicated that, in the light of their subsequent experience, they had found the original objectives had been completely relevant to the situation as it existed when the project was formulated; the remaining 35 per cent found the original project objectives to have been "substantially" relevant.

4. Effectiveness in achieving immediate or short-term project objectives

37. Ninety-one per cent of the respondents had rated achievements as adequate or better; of them, 43 per cent had found achievement to have been "complete". The reasons given for ratings of less than complete achievement had included delays in project implementation, problems in the acquisition of suitable equipment and delays attributable to governmental policy.

5. Impact: achievement of the project's long-range objectives

38. Ninety-six per cent of the respondents indicated that the level of achievement of the project's long-term objectives had been adequate or better. Of those, 48 per cent had found achievement to have been substantial, while 30 per cent had assessed project achievement as complete.

6. Indirect product

39. Among the unplanned results arising from the project's activities, the most frequently cited had been the increased expertise gained by national project personnel and the opportunity to collaborate with a number of other governmental and non-governmental entities on various activities related to the project. The latter, indirect result was particularly important, since a number of respondents had indicated that the exchange of information among various government departments and agencies was very low.

7. Advisory services in demographic statistics

40. The objective of the advisory services during the period under examination had been to provide support to country projects financed by UNFPA and executed by DTCD in the areas of population censuses, civil registration and vital statistics and other activities relating to the collection of demographic data. Some services were provided for the planning of the project concerned, and other services were provided for the implementation of the project. In addition, some advisory services were concerned with the follow-up activities related to the completed projects.

41. The usefulness of the advisory services had been noted with particular reference to the preparatory work for the population census - namely, the planning of census activities and their co-ordination; the preparation of census materials such as cartographic maps, questionnaire forms and tabulations; the establishment of the necessary administrative and organizational apparatus; and the identification of staffing and training needs. What had proved to be most valuable about the pre-enumeration advice had been that potential problems had been identified and addressed before the census was conducted. In that way, it had been pointed out that many recommendations had helped to minimize flaws and errors which could not only give rise to costly delays and complications but also affect the overall results.

42. In one instance, the recommendations of an advisory mission had been usefully combined with a pre-census pilot survey undertaken by the Government concerned to determine a more appropriate approach to the census. In some other cases, the recommendations of the mission concerned had served as a basis for co-operation and co-ordination among the key governmental agencies involved. The recommendations of advisory missions had also been found to be generally realistic and to have helped to simplify techniques and procedures and to facilitate their application.

43. In addition to pre-census preparations, a number of missions had been cited for their contribution to the evaluation of progress in the conduct of the census, particularly in analysing the problems and bottlenecks encountered in the course of the conduct and in providing solutions to them. Such missions had often provided on-the-job training to personnel conducting the census and had served as an impetus for the full implementation of the work plan.

44. In contrast to the general contribution of the missions, the impact of the advisory services provided had been found to have been mitigated by the delay in the implementation of their recommendations. In cases where there was a delay in implementation, there had eventually been full implementation. The actions taken in line with the recommendations had been said to have contributed not only directly to the project concerned but also to the initiative and formulation of new projects. That had underscored the contribution of those missions and their importance in minimizing project delays. Part of the cause of delay had been beyond the control of the advisory service or the country project concerned and attributable to such factors as the host country's prevailing internal situation, its decision-making process and changing priorities, the availability of appropriate local personnel including candidates for training, constraints in the governmental agency concerned, including work priorities and staff changes.

45. Other deficiencies had been said to relate to the qualifications and performance of some of the advisory staff, the country project itself, which the advisory service had been intended to support, and short-comings in planning and co-ordinating project activities.

IV. PLANS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION IN STATISTICS

46. In line with the recommendations of the Working Group of the Statistical Commission, the Statistical Office has developed the following tentative plan for assessing the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics. The goal would be to provide a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics in terms of its impact on the statistical capability of a country. Such an assessment would involve the collection of detailed information on all of the technical co-operation projects in statistics carried out in specific countries by the United Nations system, other multilateral agencies and bilateral donor countries and the assessment of their impact on improving the statistical capability and the relevance of the projects to the priority needs of the country. The following is a tentative outline of what would be involved in such a country approach for a comprehensive assessment:

(a) The study should cover all of the technical co-operation activities in statistics completed over a long term, such as the past 10 years, and collect all basic project documents relating to them;

(b) An in-depth review of those projects by a consultant who would discuss the projects with the national statistical office, user agencies in the country, the executing agencies and funding agencies;

(c) A report prepared by the consultant would be circulated among the above-named offices and agencies involved and the comments received from them would be included in the final report;

(d) The study should include two or three countries at different stages of statistical development, including the volume and nature of technical co-operation provided in the past.

47. The study detailed above would require a substantial amount of extrabudgetary funds for engaging a consultant and carrying out the in-depth country evaluating studies aimed at a comprehensive assessment. It is also essential to have full co-operation from the countries selected for the study and from all of the organizations that have provided technical co-operation in statistics to the selected countries. A period of at least one year would be required to complete the work, after the approval of funds is obtained. Such a study would, of course, be subject to a number of the limitations discussed in section II above. The Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat has undertaken some preliminary efforts to secure the needed extrabudgetary funds for the study; progress made in that regard will be reported orally to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fourth session.

48. An alternative, more modest plan has also been developed. Under it, an overall review of the current state of statistics and statistical development in developing countries would be undertaken drawing on the work on indicators described in section V below and in various studies of national statistical practices and activities carried out over the years by the United Nations and other international agencies. Such a review would set out the situation in each decade since the 1950s so that overall changes in the statistical situation in the developing countries could be clearly identified. In that way, significant progress or retrogression for broad fields of statistics or geographical regions would be noted and remaining gaps specified. Although such a review would be based on country-by-country information on statistical activities over the past four decades, the focus of analysis would be regional and global. Of course, the approach would not answer the question of whether those changes were the result of technical co-operation efforts or occurred independently. Similarly, the approach would not provide an assessment of the overall effectiveness of technical co-operation activities in any given country, although it might provide a basis by which the accomplishments of individual countries might be assessed. However, the resources required to carry out the review of changes in the level of statistical development in the developing countries would certainly be more modest than the larger country-oriented assessment being considered. It is also perhaps a more cost-effective approach, given the range of the various project- and programme-oriented evaluation activities already in place (see sect. III above for some examples) and the inherent difficulties of the more ambitious approach.

V. A PLAN FOR IDENTIFYING INDICATORS OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL CAPABILITIES

49. The Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination, at its eleventh session in 1985, suggested that the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat identify or develop appropriate global indicators of national statistical capability and use those indicators to assess the changes in capability on a global scale over a recent period of time. The Working Group was

of the opinion that such indicators might include, for example, the ability to compile national accounts or to carry out surveys, the availability of statistical data collected, processed, published and used, and the number of trained personnel, and that such an assessment could be done by experienced staff of the international agencies with overall co-ordination by the Statistical Office.

50. As a first step towards exploring such global indicators of national statistical capability, the Statistical Office is undertaking a study of the availability of selected statistical series in various subject-matter fields. In order to obtain appropriate information for that work from international statistical agencies, the Statistical Office has sent out a questionnaire enquiring about the availability of selected statistical series in the subject-matter fields for which they are responsible.

51. In the questionnaire, the agencies are asked to select two or three basic statistical series that they have been collecting from countries on a regular basis since 1970. The two or three series are considered to be of central importance to the agency's work and reflect the overall availability from each country in a general way.

52. For the selected statistical series in the questionnaire, an indicator would be provided as to whether or not the data are available for the years 1972 and 1982 with respect to individual countries. If the agency has made any assessment of the general quality of the series, a code indicating the data quality is also asked for in the questionnaire. Information provided through the questionnaire in respect of individual countries will be used only in an aggregate way for constructing regional or global indicators of the availability of statistics.

53. The data from the questionnaires would provide a picture of overall availability and, hopefully, of the quality of selected statistical series and their changes over time, by region. They would be, in a way, reflecting a net effect of statistical development activities, including technical co-operation, during the decade in the respective field of statistics. They would also contribute to a better understanding of remaining major statistical needs. It is anticipated that the preliminary results of the study could be available to report to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fourth session.

VI. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

54. The Statistical Commission may wish to:

(a) Comment on the tentative plan for a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics based on a country approach as well as the more modest approach outlined;

(b) Comment on the proposed plan for identifying indicators of national statistical capability and the efficacy of those indicators for measuring changes in national statistical capability;

(c) Provide further guidance on how best to pursue the subject in a useful and cost-effective manner.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1985, Supplement No. 6 (E/CN.3/1985/23), para. 111.

2/ "In-depth evaluation of the population programme: report of the Secretary-General" (E/AC.51/1986/9). The conclusions of CPC on the in-depth evaluation are contained in its report on its twenty-sixth session (A/41/38).
