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CO-ORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL
STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

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

SUMMARY

At its twelfth session, the Working Group reviewed the provisional agenda for the twenty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission (paras. 4-7), made suggestions on the content of the documentation (paras. 8-49 and 59-61), considered the co-ordination of statistical activities (paras. 50-61), discussed the special topics that the Commission might wish to consider at future sessions (para. 62) and reviewed progress and plans on the revision of the System of National Accounts (paras. 63-64) and on environment statistics (paras. 65-66).

* E/CN.3/1989/1.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The twelfth session of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination of the Statistical Commission was held at Geneva from 6 to 9 October 1987. The agenda, as adopted, is contained in the annex to the present report.
2. Pursuant to the decision of the Working Group at its earlier sessions, the officers of the Commission who attended served as officers of the Working Group, with E. Oti Boateng (Ghana) acting as Chairman of the session. Other members present were: L. A. Beccaria (Argentina), V. Micka (Czechoslovakia), M. G. Sardana (India), S. Kuzmicich (New Zealand), N. G. Belov (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and D. M. Tella (United States of America).
3. The following were represented: Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), International Labour Organisation (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank, European Economic Community (EEC), and the International Statistical Institute (ISI).

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

4. The Working Group endorsed the provisional agenda that had been approved by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fourth session and by the Economic and Social Council at its first regular session of 1987 by its decision 1987/117. The Working Group also made the following additions and modifications:
 - (a) It selected two "special issues" - namely, item 3(a), "Co-ordination of international statistical activities", and item 3(b), "Selection and recruitment of professional staff for work in national statistical offices and statistical services of the United Nations";
 - (b) It added an item 3(c), "Recurrent statistical publications of the United Nations", in response to a request of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination at its twenty-sixth session; 1/
 - (c) It added a new sub-item 4(b), "System of Balances of the National Economy (MPS)" and changed the numbering of former sub-item 4(b), "Links between the System of National Accounts and the System of Balances of the National Economy", to 4(c);
 - (d) It decided that item 6, "International economic classifications", should have two sub-items, 6(a), "International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC) and Central Product Classification (CPC)", and 6(b), "International classification of status in employment".

5. The Working Group expressed its appreciation to members of the Statistical Commission who made available in writing their views on the relative priority and usefulness of the documents (proposed for the twenty-fifth session) and additional suggestions for special issues for the twenty-fifth session, in response to a written follow-up by the Statistical Office at the request of the Statistical Commission. The Working Group also expressed appreciation of the views expressed by Commission members on the desirable contents of the documents.

6. The Working Group recalled that the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fourth session had expressed the view that, overall, the documentation for the twenty-fourth session had been of high standard. The Working Group noted that the documentation was of value not only for the Statistical Commission but also for national statistical offices as technical reference documents, and expressed the desire to maintain the same coverage and depth in documentation for the twenty-fifth session as had been achieved for the twenty-fourth session. The Working Group recognized, however, that in preserving the quality aspect it would also have to keep in mind the resource limitations of the Statistical Office as it made decisions on documentation.

7. The Working Group approved the outlines of the documents for each agenda item, as set out in a restricted document entitled "Proposals and outlines for documentation for the twenty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission" and as provided orally with the additions, exceptions and comments set out in paragraphs 8-49 and 59-61 below.

Agenda item 3: Special issues

- (a) Co-ordination of international statistical activities (See paras. 59-61 below)
- (b) Selection and recruitment of professional staff for work in national statistical offices and statistical services of the United Nations

8. The Working Group considered that the document and the Statistical Commission's consideration of it could be expected to provide particular guidance for the United Nations in its process of selection and recruitment of professional staff for the statistical services, and requested that the points for discussion in the document should be structured to ensure such guidance.

9. The Working Group agreed that in looking at selection and recruitment of staff it was necessary to assess the emerging work in an organization and the methods to be used to carry out that work so as to determine the skill mix needed. In addition to the initial issues of selection and recruitment, it was noted that the question of career management, including in-house training to bring appointees' skills and abilities fully in line with the job requirements, and other questions of career management, including mobility, were also important. However, the Working Group agreed that a full consideration of those matters was beyond the scope of the document and decided that the document should concentrate on the selection and recruitment aspects while referring to the other concerns of work environment assessment, mobility, training and career management.

10. The Working Group requested that the list of national statistical offices selected to receive the questionnaire proposed in the restricted document should include all the countries on the Statistical Commission and the questionnaire should include a question on the system of selection/recruitment of statistical personnel at the state or provincial level and should also ask for details of examination systems in use, including examples of the examinations used.

(c) Recurrent statistical publications of the United Nations

11. The Working Group was informed of the decision of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination which gave rise to the agenda item, as follows:

"The Committee decided to request the Secretary-General (utilizing the Publications Board) to communicate to the intergovernmental bodies that had authorized recurrent publications a request to review those publications in the light of the criteria set forth in General Assembly resolution 38/32 E, with a view to terminating those publications that did not meet those criteria or to reducing their periodicity or volume of issuance, if that was called for." 2/

12. The Working Group agreed that the documentation should include the relevant extracts from the report of the Secretary-General, entitled "Recurrent publications of the United Nations" (E/AC.51/1987/12), supplemented by a covering note explaining more fully what was requested of the Commission, providing updated information where necessary, and any additional information that might be obtained on user needs.

13. The Working Group was informed that the Statistical Office was undertaking a review of its publications and the balance between the various forms of dissemination available - namely, printed publications, computer tapes, diskettes, microfiches etc. Preliminary information on the review would be made available to the Commission and it could shape the programme of recurrent publications in 1990-1991. The Working Group cautioned that decisions on the recurrent publications should be taken only on the basis of careful assessment.

14. The value of information on user needs for statistical data was recognized, but the difficulties in obtaining reliable feedback were also recognized. The Statistical Office intended to further explore a variety of channels, including contact with expert users, which had been used successfully in the past. The point was made that the statistical data bases compiled and maintained by the Statistical Office were a rich and valuable asset and that a higher price could be charged to some users, especially commercial users, resulting in increased revenue for the United Nations. Care would need to be taken in assessing the additional financial benefits in relation to possible impacts on and reactions by Member States who provide the statistics to the United Nations.

Agenda item 4: National accounts and balances(a) System of National Accounts (SNA)

15. The Working Group agreed that the document should include a brief statement aimed at informing non-experts of the reasons for the revision, the major changes agreed on so far, implications for countries in implementing the revised SNA and other important features of the revision. Under the section on data issues, it was recognized that availability and quality of data used for national accounts purposes might not be a problem uniquely for developing countries; developed countries also frequently had problems ensuring that economic surveys covered all the economic activity that should be covered for national accounts. The problem should be recognized in the document, but the primary focus should be on those data-availability issues that were unique to developing countries.

16. The Working Group noted that at the time the document for the item would be finalized, there would still be unresolved issues and work in progress. There would be some draft chapters of the revised SNA completed and available to the Commission and the unfinished chapters would be described, in outline, in the document.

(b) System of Balances of the National Economy (MPS)

17. The Working Group decided to invite the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) to prepare a document on developments related to MPS.

(c) Links between the System of National Accounts and the System of Balances of the National Economy

18. The Working Group requested that the document under the agenda item be structured in such a way as to elicit useful guidance from the Commission on the revision of the technical publication, Comparisons of the System of National Accounts and the System of Balances of the National Economy, Part One: Conceptual Relationships.^{3/} It further requested that the document should also give attention to common aggregates. The Working Group also agreed that the document should include a brief summary for non-experts, describing in as simple terms as possible what the attempts at linkages involved and what had been achieved to date.

Agenda item 5: Service statistics

19. The Working Group noted that the document would be expanded by strengthening the coverage of international trade in services in all sections of the report, reflecting the high interest of many developing countries and a number of new initiatives in the area. The document would also address a number of related methodological issues, particularly in respect of certain elements of the SNA (particularly external sector transactions), balance-of-payment and external debt statistics. The Working Group considered that it was important to make adequate cross-references to other documents for the Statistical Commission, in particular cross-references among the documents on the System of National Accounts, revision and harmonization of economic classifications and service statistics, reflecting

the interdependence among those three items. The Working Group also noted that the Statistical Office planned to send invitations to a range of countries to submit information and their views on the topic that would be helpful in preparing the document and in particular providing illustrations of particular points. As a reflection of the expanded scope of the document, the Working Group changed the title to read "Report on plans for the further development of service statistics, including international trade in services".

20. The point was made that the document should recognize the need for both appropriate classification systems and a well-structured directory of relevant enterprises and constituent establishments if an integrated survey of services was to be conducted. Complementary to that, and especially in developing countries, the statistical services available from administrative records were meagre and a suitable strategy needed to be developed to provide data pertaining to various segments of the services sector. The document should also take account of the Statistical Commission's work on recommendations for a statistical programme for household and small-scale industries and should explore the links between service statistics and the measurement of employment in the informal sector.

21. The Working Group stressed that in chapter III of the document careful thought should be given to the appropriate role for the Statistical Office in regard to service statistics. It was recognized that the current work on services was a co-operative effort among several international organizations and countries and the assignment of activities was largely determined by considerations of where the necessary expertise existed. However, the Working Group agreed that, in addition to any substantive work programme, the Statistical Office would need to take on an active co-ordinating and dissemination role to keep countries and international organizations more fully informed of developments and to enhance the possibilities of their participation. It was agreed that the best way to proceed was for the Statistical Office to make a proposal to the Statistical Commission for its consideration and decision.

Agenda item 6: International economic classifications

(a) International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC) and Central Product Classification (CPC)

22. The Working Group agreed that the document should address the question of conversion keys, practical aspects including timing of introducing new classifications at the national level, structural relationships between the two classifications, and any remaining work to be done on harmonization. The document should also incorporate, in section I, regional experience on classification work at CMEA, along with other organizations. The Working Group also agreed that the points for discussion should include a consideration of whether the frequency and timing of the ISIC revision process was statistically efficient and whether there was any way to make essential changes to the classification in between the main revisions. The Working Group noted that some of the material from the document would become part of the explanatory material to be published with the classifications themselves.

(b) International classification of status in employment

23. The Working Group noted that the item would be discussed on the basis of a document to be prepared by the International Labour Organisation on the problems and issues of a classification of status in employment, reasons for proposing a revision of the existing classification and outlining work under way towards that end. The Working Group further noted that a report was being submitted to the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in October 1987 which would, after revision in the light of country comments, form the basis of the document to the Statistical Commission.

Agenda item 7: Price statistics

24. The Working Group recalled the views expressed by the Statistical Commission at its previous session on the usefulness and limitations of the International Comparison Project (ICP) results and noted a number of country experiences where concern had been expressed about the reliability of results and the need for additional professional substantive review of results at both the national and international levels prior to their publication.

25. The Working Group considered that the Statistical Office could provide a balanced and objective assessment of the ICP. Accordingly, it was agreed that the document should contain a careful evaluation of the progress and conduct of the ICP, assessing its strengths and weaknesses and drawing conclusions to put before the Commission. Such an evaluation should include an examination of the statistical validity of the results and their credibility and usefulness. The evaluation should also consider recommending expanded substantive review and analysis of results at the national level and by the organizations involved before results are published for future phases. The Working Group requested the Statistical Office to write to participating countries to provide comments on the ICP, including problems involved, concerns they have, uses made of the results and benefits achieved, and to non-participating countries on their reasons for not participating, to identify the barriers to participation and to find ways to overcome those barriers. The analysis of the responses, and the critical evaluation referred to above, should be included in section II of the document.

Agenda item 8: Demographic, social and environment statistics

(a) Population and housing censuses

26. The Working Group noted that the Statistical Commission had discussed at length at its previous session the question of population and housing censuses and had reviewed and approved revised supplementary recommendations on the subject. The Working Group considered that for the twenty-fifth session, the Commission would be unlikely to engage in a major substantive discussion on the topic again but would wish to be informed of developments. Consequently, and bearing in mind the need for control and limitation of documents, the Working Group decided to merge the document into the document proposed under agenda item 9. The coverage of the subject should remain as set out in the proposed outline in the restricted document, but the various elements should be treated more concisely. In addition,

the document should address some of the issues related to the co-ordination of work on economic censuses with that on population and housing censuses where the association of those censuses is appropriate.

(b) Social statistics and indicators

27. The Working Group agreed that work on statistics and indicators related to crime and drugs should be covered in the document on social statistics and indicators, as those areas were of major social concern. The Working Group stressed that a clear and full exposition was required of the work being done by the Statistical Office on development of social statistics and indicators and on the co-ordination activities that were being carried out in that area at the national and international levels. The document should, inter alia, answer the following questions:

(a) What is the United Nations doing on co-ordination and development of social statistics and indicators at the national level?

(b) Is the United Nations framework for the systematization of demographic and social statistics being applied? If so, how?

(c) Is the United Nations helping countries produce statistics and indicators in that framework?

(d) Are the indicators appropriate to the needs of countries?

(e) Is the Statistical Office doing analyses and comparisons of social statistics and indicators to help test them?

(f) What kinds of co-ordination activities are being undertaken with international organizations? Are they successful in reducing duplication?

(g) Is the Statistical Office setting standards so that administrative data are suitable for developing statistics?

(h) What is the basis of selecting indicators in relation to the various special population groups?

28. The Working Group requested the Statistical Office to include in the points for discussion a consideration of the state of national and international work on social statistics and indicators and whether additional steps should be taken at the international level towards further systematization and standardization. The suggestion was made to highlight indicators and focus on their role more than in past similar reports to the Statistical Commission.

29. The Working Group noted that the Statistical Office efforts were concentrated at the country level on trying to help countries make a rational selection of indicators for their own policy purposes and as determined by the country's own situation. It also noted that there had been efforts to develop world-level indicators by several of the specialized agencies and that global effort was

encouraging countries to search for and develop data and to do intersectoral reviews and was increasing the availability of useful social statistics and indicators at the national level.

30. The Working Group agreed that the Statistical Office should play an active role in the preparation of the document, "Development of guidelines on national accounts for women's contribution to development", and agreed that the document should contain references to the related work of the International Labour Organisation, in addition to the basic work being done by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). It should also address the question of the feasibility of achieving the objectives of measurement in that area, explore alternative methods of measurement and estimation and explore the issues and problems, including technical measurement problems such as classification and disaggregation and shed more light on the ongoing process of measuring women's contribution to development.

(c) Environment statistics

31. The Working Group agreed that the document should cover the work and plans of the regional commissions and should present proposals for future collaboration based on consultations with them whereby the special expertise and experience of all the organizations could be combined to help carry out the global programme and regional programmes in the most effective way. The Working Group took note of the compendium of environment statistics ^{4/} recently published by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and requested that the ECE be asked to suggest any ways its experience might be helpful to the Statistical Office and the other regional commissions in advancing their work programmes.

(d) Patterns of consumption: qualitative aspects of development

32. The Working Group recalled the discussion of the topic at the twenty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission, noted that the study had its origins in a number of resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and that the Statistical Office was working with the principal national and international bodies involved on how to respond and meet the needs expressed.

33. The Working Group was informed that the nature and content of the document would depend upon progress made by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in its efforts at raising funds for the project and carrying out the necessary research and field work. The Working Group was also informed of UNRISD's work to date on preparing a project document, consultations with the Statistical Office and other involved organizations, and UNRISD's initial views on alternative ways to carry out the project, including the conduct of country case studies. The Working Group was reassured that the resource involvement of the Statistical Office for the study was modest. The Working Group agreed that the title of the document should be shortened by the Secretariat.

Agenda item 9: General development and integration of methodological work

34. The Working Group agreed that the document could usefully accommodate reporting on areas where no major discussion was expected but for which the

Commission needed to be kept informed of developments. That approach was seen as providing a measure of flexibility to the Commission to deal with subjects while paying due regard to limiting documentation. It was agreed that section III of the document, which was on international trade and transport statistics, would include, inter alia, a consideration of issues relating to deflators for international trade flows in view of the growing importance attached by many countries to that area of work.

Agenda item 10: Technical co-operation

35. In relation to the first document, "Report on technical co-operation in statistics", the Working Group emphasized the importance of obtaining as full a coverage of donors as possible and of incorporating information from bilateral donors, including information on the nature and range of their co-operation, in order to give a comprehensive picture of technical co-operation in statistics, its scale, and the role and importance of the Statistical Office in it. The Working Group considered that such a comprehensive picture was important for the Statistical Commission, since technical co-operation was a significant part of the work of the Statistical Office. A comprehensive document was also considered useful for national statistical offices as reference information.

36. The Working Group decided that the second document, "Report on proposals on the long-range future of the National Household Survey Capability Programme", should be discussed by the Statistical Commission immediately prior to the fourth document "Report of the World Bank on the methodology used in the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) prototype surveys, together with an evaluation of the results achieved, as well as the best way of integrating the LSMS methodology into continuing survey programmes, such as those carried out under the National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP)".

37. In relation to the third document, "Report on the current state of statistics and statistical development in developing countries and summary of recent evaluations of statistical projects by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA)", the Working Group considered that the information to be assembled should be supplemented by a pilot survey sent to a selected number of countries that receive technical co-operation in statistics. The survey should ask for information on technical co-operation received over the preceding two years from all sources, including the work-months of technical experts and the purpose or field of assistance. It should also seek to identify the national organization/department that would have knowledge of all technical assistance in statistics provided to the country. The survey should also ask for the country's assessment of the assistance given, the country's priorities for future assistance, and any modification to the process that a country believes would help make the provision of assistance more effective in the future.

38. The Working Group recognized that all the information of interest would not generally be available from a recipient country or from the donor country alone, in part because of the way co-operation is sometimes funded or packaged for countries and the ways in which records are maintained. It was also recognized that,

depending on internal administrative arrangements in countries, the national statistical office may not have had available to it all information on statistical assistance, especially if the national statistical system was a decentralized one.

39. The Working Group agreed that chapter I of the document should address the international reporting capability of countries and that chapter II should include the UNDP evaluation of the NHSCP. The document should also identify future needs for technical co-operation.

40. The Working Group agreed that by drawing together the wide range of information from various sources as proposed, the document would have substantial value as a reference and guide on technical co-operation and should provide a good vehicle for eliciting advice from the Statistical Commission. The Working Group recognized that the scope of the document was very wide and that implementation of the work would need to be tailored to fit resource availability.

41. The Working Group agreed that the fourth document, which was on the Living Standards Measurement Study and collaboration between the NHSCP and the LSMS, would provide information on developments in the study, relevant experience, details of how the pilot surveys were conducted, cost aspects and an evaluation. The document should have a forward orientation and cover the issues involved in developing the LSMS along with the NHSCP so as to meet the survey needs of developing countries.

42. The Working Group noted the high level of co-operation that characterized work on the two projects. The Chairman expressed his gratitude to V. R. Rao, the former Project Co-ordinator of the Central Co-ordinating Unit of the NHSCP, who had recently retired, for his outstanding work on the development of the NHSCP over the past five years and expressed his confidence that the newly appointed Project Co-ordinator, Parmeet Singh, would provide the necessary leadership to continue the success of the Programme.

Agenda item 11: Co-ordination and integration of international statistical programmes

43. The Working Group noted that the report of its current session would be considered by the Commission. See also paragraphs 59-61 below.

Agenda item 12: Programme implementation

44. The Working Group considered that it would be helpful to the Statistical Commission and to national statistical offices if the organizations whose plans were included in the document under agenda item 13, "Programme objectives and planning", could also provide progress reports on work done for incorporation in "Report on the statistical work of the international organizations".

45. The Working Group recalled the discussion of co-ordination among the international statistical organizations at the Statistical Commission's twenty-fourth session under the agenda item "Review of the Commission's functioning". The Working Group expressed its appreciation to the Statistical Office for the continuing and successful efforts at promoting co-ordination, and

its thanks to the regional commissions, specialized agencies and non-United Nations organizations for their active and positive co-operation, which had been demonstrated in part by the co-operation and contributions to the integrated documents on progress and plans for the Commission.

Agenda item 13: Programme objectives and planning

46. In relation to "Report on the plans in statistics of the international organizations", the Working Group was informed that the United Nations was considering deferring the next medium-term plan for two years, so that it would come into effect in 1992. Consequently, the information on future plans for the Statistical Office for incorporation in the document would be determined by any decision taken on that matter. The Working Group agreed that the points for discussion should address the implications of ongoing national statistical work for the future plans of the international organizations.

47. The Working Group recalled the discussions at the twenty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission on the financial crisis of the United Nations and the review in the United Nations on the structure and functioning of the economic and social sectors. The Working Group decided to include in the report, "Proposed work programme of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat for the biennium 1990-1991 and information on the medium-term plan 1990-1995", a progress report on the implications of the financial crisis and any organizational changes in the economic and social sectors of the United Nations for the Statistical Office, and to include a consideration of those issues in the points for discussion of the document.

48. In relation to the conference room paper on the proposed work programme for 1990-1991, the Working Group expressed its satisfaction that the proposed outline was responsive to the requests made by the Commission at recent sessions, and particularly at its twenty-fourth session, for additional information on resource allocations for the various activity areas of the Statistical Office, which would assist the Statistical Commission in its review function and determination of priorities.

49. For comments relevant to the conference room paper on the medium-term plan for the period 1990-1995, see paragraphs 47-48 above.

III. CO-ORDINATION OF STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES

A. Ad hoc requests to Member States for statistics from non-statistical units of the United Nations and other international organizations

50. The Working Group recalled that the Commission had expressed concern at its twenty-fourth session at the growth of ad hoc requests to Member States for statistical information from non-statistical units of the United Nations and other organizations. The Working Group was pleased to note that the ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities took the matter up at its twenty-first session in June 1987

and "considered it essential that a clear policy be developed in each organization requiring that the statistical unit of an organization be consulted prior to any statistical inquiry being sent to countries" (ACC/1987/PG/11, para. 65). The Working Group noted that the issue was being pursued further by each organization internally and at the highest level of inter-agency co-ordination - namely, the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination. The Working Group was pleased to note that several agencies already had machinery in place for review of questionnaires to countries and that a number of other agencies were initiating action on the matter, and it expressed appreciation that the matter was being addressed.

51. The Working Group recognized that ad hoc requests from non-statistical units for statistical information often served important purposes. However, the Working Group considered that review of those ad hoc requests was essential to minimize the burden on countries, by reducing unnecessary duplication in the collection of statistics, and to ensure the provision of comparable and appropriate statistics to requesting units. In addition, adequate review by the statistical services of each organization would help to ensure that such requests were not only reasonable but also appropriate to the availability of data and the capabilities of countries, especially developing countries. It would also help ensure that appropriate statistics were collected for the specific purposes of the study envisaged. Several specific suggestions were made for internal mechanisms which might assist organizations in efforts to control ad hoc requests. The Working Group requested the Statistical Office and the other international organizations to pursue through all available avenues the improved co-ordination of ad hoc questionnaires and to report to the Statistical Commission at its next session on progress.

B. Inventory of statistical data collection activities

52. The Working Group reviewed "Inventory of statistical data collection activities" and considered that it continued to be a useful instrument for co-ordination of statistical data collection activities by the international statistical organizations and that it also served to assist national statistical offices in knowing what the overall picture was of international requests for statistics and in facilitating their efforts to co-ordinate responses to those requests.

53. Some instances of apparent overlapping in collection were pointed out for study by the Statistical Office, and a number of suggestions were made concerning the timing of the sending out of questionnaires which would assist countries in organizing their responses. Several points were made concerning the inventory, as follows:

(a) It is important that the inventory have complete coverage of the requesting organizations and the expansion that had been achieved in coverage in recent years was welcomed;

(b) The inventory should cover all statistical questionnaires if they are sent regularly, even if the data collected serve only a limited purpose. In those cases, consideration should be given by the collecting organization to disseminating the collected data more widely;

(c) The inventory would be more useful at the national level if the descriptions of the questionnaires were more detailed in covering such things as the classifications used, units of measurement and time-period coverage of data requested and if annex II were structured by months of reporting deadlines rather than months of despatch of the questionnaires by the requesting organization.

54. The Working Group recognized that a lot of success had been achieved over the years in the co-ordination of statistical data collection by the international organizations and requested them to continue their efforts, keeping the reporting burdens on countries in mind, and requested the Statistical Office to send the inventory to national statistical offices for their use and comment.

55. A number of general observations were made on the issues of data collection, including the following:

(a) It would be desirable, as already stated by the Statistical Commission, if the national statistical offices could be informed of statistics-related requests from international organizations to other governmental departments. That would enable the national statistical offices to be informed, to co-ordinate responses, where necessary and within the purview of the statistical office, ultimately improving the quality and timeliness of data supplied by countries. It was noted that requests from international organizations were frequently passed on to the national statistical office by the receiving department, especially in developing countries, so that advance information to the national statistical office would be useful;

(b) The process of co-ordination would be assisted if countries informed the international organizations of specific examples of duplicative data collection, although it was recognized that in decentralized systems the existence of duplication may not be readily apparent, although the information in the inventory would be a guide in such situations.

C. Representation of regional intergovernmental statistical bodies in the Statistical Commission

56. The Working Group considered the question of representation of the regional intergovernmental statistical bodies at the Statistical Commission sessions, which had been raised by the Chairman of the Conference of European Statisticians in a letter to the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe.

57. The Working Group noted that the current organization and functioning of the Commission failed to provide for regional perspectives to be presented to the Statistical Commission from a representative of the regional intergovernmental statistical bodies as distinct from the secretariats of the regional commissions. The Working Group recalled that some concern had been expressed about that situation during discussions at the previous session of the Statistical Commission when it had discussed its own functioning. It further noted the timeliness of the issue, given the current review in the United Nations of the structure and functioning of the intergovernmental arrangements in the economic and social sectors.

58. The Working Group requested the Statistical Office to take the necessary steps to invite the chairmen of the appropriate regional intergovernmental statistical bodies to participate in the next session of the Statistical Commission as observers and, if necessary, to approach the executive secretaries of the regional commissions to see if funds could be provided to assist in their participation. The Working Group noted that while a more formal status in the Commission would be desirable, the establishment of such a status would depend upon a formal decision by the Economic and Social Council and the regional commissions. The process might be assisted by favourable endorsement by the Statistical Commission and regional statistical bodies. Nevertheless, the Working Group recognized that complex issues were involved relating to the composition of all functional commissions and other subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council. The Working Group considered that that kind of regional participation in the Statistical Commission would have wider-ranging implications for the role of the regions in ongoing statistical activities at the international level. It would also serve to integrate more fully any regional initiatives into the overall global framework of statistical work.

D. Discussion of co-ordination of international statistical activities as a special topic

59. Recalling its decision to include co-ordination of international statistical activities as a special topic in the agenda of the twenty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission, the Working Group agreed that the consideration of the topic should focus on both substantive co-ordination and organizational co-ordination. Under substantive co-ordination the Commission would deal with the question of how better to co-ordinate statistics to make them more comparable internationally and could encompass such issues and questions as:

(a) Areas where more effort should be made to standardize definitions, classifications and practices internationally;

(b) Ways and means of promoting the wider implementation of international recommendations and guidelines in countries;

(c) The further development of international statistics and limits on international data harmonization;

(d) Should the Statistical Office be doing more analysis and interpretation of the data it publishes?;

(e) Timeliness of issuing revised international classifications, and,

(f) Creating and updating conversion keys for international classifications.

The discussion of organizational co-ordination would cover some of the issues raised at the twenty-fourth session of the Commission when it discussed its own functioning, including:

(a) Strengthening the co-ordinating role of the Commission with respect to the statistical work of the specialized agencies, non-United Nations intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations and understanding the division of responsibilities;

(b) The role of the Working Group in relation to function (d) of the Commission - namely, "advising the organs of the United Nations on general questions relating to the collection, analysis and dissemination of statistical information"; 5/

(c) The overall question of decentralization.

60. The Working Group agreed that the documentation for the item on the agenda would be the current report of the Working Group, but requested the Statistical Office to write to Commission members in advance to alert them to the item to enable them adequately to formulate their views.

61. The Working Group noted the wide-ranging discussion of co-ordination that it had undertaken and emphasized that the concept was broad, relating not just to the elimination of duplication in data collection and other activities but also addressing the basic issue of further improving the statistical system, enhancing the usefulness of statistics and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the way statistical operations are carried out. The Working Group noted that the effectiveness of many efforts at co-ordination was impaired by the limited opportunities for staff of the Statistical Office to participate in technical, organizational and co-ordination meetings sponsored by the regional commissions and other international organizations, due to restrictions on travel funds.

IV. SPECIAL TOPICS TO BE TAKEN UP BY THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION AT SESSIONS FOLLOWING THE TWENTY-FIFTH

62. The Working Group considered the item on the basis of a restricted note entitled "Consolidated list of special topics", containing a supplementary list of topics suggested by members of the Statistical Commission in response to a request by the Commission and information on plans of the Conference of European Statisticians for their discussion of special topics (Note entitled "Substantive discussions at future plenary sessions" [CES/592]). The Working Group considered that it was not desirable to select topics in 1987 for the Commission session in 1991 since priorities and concerns could change in the intervening years. The Working Group requested the Statistical Office to condense the items in the consolidated list and the supplementary list mentioned above into a short list of approximately 10 items as an aid for the next session of the Commission in selecting topics for future discussion. In carrying out the consolidation all methodology-related items could be combined, other co-ordination items could be combined and topics of relevance to developing countries should be included.

V. REVISION OF THE SYSTEM OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

63. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of an oral report from the Director of the Statistical Office in which the Director reported that:

(a) Arrangements were proceeding to obtain resources for the preparation of the draft of a revised System of National Accounts (SNA) and to engage the International Association for Research on Income and Wealth to undertake the task with the assistance of an expert;

(b) Arrangements were proceeding to ensure that French and Spanish versions of the draft revision would be prepared on a current basis;

(c) Plans for expert groups and regional meetings on a variety of component parts of the SNA had been made, although additional extrabudgetary support was still required for some of the expert group meetings;

(d) Assuming that arrangements for preparing the draft of the revision are satisfactorily concluded, the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth would endeavour to solicit funds, inter alia, to pay for travel of experts to attend expert group meetings;

(e) Additional support and guidance was continuing to be provided by the Inter-secretariat Working Group on National Accounts as well as by a large number of experts in national accounts throughout the world.

64. Several points were made during the discussion, including:

(a) The expert group meetings should be structured so that decisions in their areas of competence are made;

(b) The Statistical Office, after receiving the views of experts, should make proposals to the Statistical Commission on priorities for the various handbooks on national accounting and should prepare outlines for those handbooks;

(c) The methods of establishing linkages between the SNA and MPS need to be developed and included in the revision process;

(d) The involved national accounts experts in the countries and international organizations should consult with users to ensure that the revised SNA meets user needs as well as technical requirements.

The Working Group expressed its satisfaction with the arrangements made for the SNA review and requested the Statistical Office to ensure that drafts of the various documents and chapters of the revised System of National Accounts were distributed as soon as possible to the experts, national organizations and regional commissions for comment and for use in the regional meetings.

VI. ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS

65. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of an oral report from the Director of the Statistical Office in which he reported:

(a) Progress on methodological work, in particular the technical report on concepts and methods of environment statistics, volumes I and II, which were on human settlements and the natural environment, respectively;

(b) Contacts made at the request of the Statistical Commission by the Chairman of the Statistical Commission and the Director of the Statistical Office with the President of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Executive Director of UNEP, respectively;

(c) Consultations between the Statistical Office and ISI on future collaboration.

The Working Group expressed the hope that the United Nations Environment Programme would respond to the programmatic suggestions made by the Commission as soon as possible. It also expressed regret at the limited replies received from experts and users involved in the review of the technical studies undertaken by the Statistical Office.

66. The Working Group was informed by the Director of the International Statistical Institute Research Centre that the Institute was working actively with the Statistical Office towards development of a collaborative programme and the development of a proposal as a basis for fund-raising for that area of work. The Working Group expressed its support for the developments in the field of environment statistics and the ongoing consultations with ISI. The Working Group also requested the Statistical Office and the World Bank to collaborate with each other, bearing in mind the new initiatives that the World Bank was taking in the field of environmental accounting and assessment.

VII. DATES AND PLACE OF THIRTEENTH SESSION

67. The Working Group recommended that its thirteenth session should be held at Geneva for four days, from 11 to 14 September 1989.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/41/38), para. 210.

2/ Ibid.

3/ United Nations publication, Sales No. 77.XVII.6.

Notes (continued)

4/ Environment Statistics in Europe and North America, Statistical Standards and Studies No. 39 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.87.II.E.28).

5/ See Economic and Social Council resolution 8 (II) of 21 June 1946, which set out the terms of reference of the Statistical Commission.

Annex

AGENDA FOR THE TWELFTH SESSION

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
3. Provisional agenda and documentation for the twenty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission.
4. Co-ordination of statistical activities.
 - (a) Ad hoc requests to Member States for statistics from non-statistical units of the United Nations and other international organizations;
 - (b) Inventory of statistical data collection activities;
 - (c) Representation of regional intergovernmental statistical bodies in the Statistical Commission;
 - (d) Discussion of co-ordination of international statistical activities as a special topic.
5. Special topics to be taken up by the Statistical Commission at sessions following the twenty-fifth session.
6. Revision of the System of National Accounts.
7. Environment statistics.
8. Dates and place of the thirteenth session.
9. Report of the Working Group to the Statistical Commission.
