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PROGRAMME QUESTIONS

Proposed work programme of the Statistical Office for the
biennium 1990-1991 and preliminary proposals for the
medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997

Report of the Secretary-General

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* E/CN.3/1989/1.

INTRODUCTION

1. At its twenty-fifth session, the Statistical Commission will have before it a note by the Secretary-General on the proposed work programme of the Statistical Office for the biennium 1990-1991 and related information (E/CN.3/1989/CRP.1) and a note by the Secretary-General containing the draft programme in statistics of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997 (E/CN.3/1989/CRP.2).

I. PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE BIENNIUM 1990-1991

2. The note on the proposed work programme will contain (a) the proposed work programme of the Statistical Office for 1990-1991; (b) proposals on priorities in the work programme; and (c) indicative figures of the number of Professional work-months allocated to each programme element, by subject-matter field and type of activity. As requested by the Commission at its twenty-fourth session and reiterated by the Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination, 1/ supplementary information on resources will be made available during the course of the twenty-fifth session.

3. The proposed work programme of the Statistical Office for the biennium 1990-1991 is tentative, since it has not yet been reviewed by the Programme Planning and Budgeting Board and is subject to change in light of the Board's central review and the Secretary-General's decision on the proposed programme budget as a whole. The Secretary-General's proposed programme budget will be submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-fourth session for consideration and approval. The proposed work programme for 1990-1991 is based on the medium-term plan for the period 1984-1989, which was extended to 1991 by the General Assembly in resolution 42/215 (see para. 6 below) and revised by the Assembly in resolution 43/219. 2/

4. The Commission should also be aware that in accordance with regulations 3.1 and rules 103.2, 103.3, 103.5, and 103.6 of the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations, although the suggestions or recommendations on the substance of the work programme made by the intergovernmental body concerned may be taken into account in the course of the preparation and review of the programme budget, the Secretary-General cannot commit himself to the adoption of such suggestions or recommendations before the proposed programme budget is completed. Furthermore, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 43/214, the outline for the 1990-1991 programme budget has already been established and the Assembly has already taken a decision on the total expenditures for that biennium. This outline reflects the post reductions mandated by the Assembly in resolution 41/213. At this stage of the preparation of the 1990-1991 programme budget, the reductions envisaged for the Statistical Office are approximately 5 per cent for Professional posts and 9 per cent for General Service posts. The draft work programme for the biennium 1990-1991 submitted to the Commission has been prepared in this context.

II. DRAFT PROGRAMME IN STATISTICS OF THE MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1992-1997

5. In accordance with the relevant regulations and rules governing programme planning, 3/ the draft programme in statistics of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997 is submitted for review and comments by the Statistical Commission (E/CN.3/1989/CRP.2).

6. It should be recalled that the General Assembly, in resolution 42/215, extended the current (1984-1989) medium-term plan until 1991, on the condition, inter alia, that the next medium-term plan be improved in its format, content and presentation. Following consideration of the draft introduction to the next medium-term plan (A/43/329) and the proposed calendar of consultations for the preparation of that plan (A/43/329/Add.1), the Assembly, in resolution 43/219, decided that the next medium-term plan should cover the period 1992-1997 and invited all intergovernmental bodies, when considering in 1989 the pertinent portions of the proposed medium-term plan, to give due attention to the most appropriate structure for the major programme or major programmes, programmes and subprogrammes submitted for their consideration, as compared with the current structure and in the light of an analysis of the objectives, trends and general orientations derived from the mandates of the intergovernmental bodies, to be provided by the Secretary-General.

7. The draft chapter on statistics submitted in document E/CN.3/1989/CRP.2 is divided into two main parts. The first part sets out the general orientation of the programme "Statistics" and is a proposed framework for the medium-term plan. The second part presents the five subprogrammes, namely (1) Developing statistical concepts and methods for use by Member States; (2) Applying advanced technology in collecting, processing and disseminating statistics; (3) Collecting, compiling and disseminating international statistics; (4) Co-ordinating international statistical programmes; and (5) Support for technical co-operation in statistics and statistical data processing. The first four subprogrammes will be implemented by the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, and the fifth subprogramme will be implemented by the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development. A thorough review of the central programmes in statistics of the current medium-term plan has resulted in this new proposal for five subprogrammes instead of the eight used currently. The five subprogrammes include all the main objectives to be fulfilled during the period 1992-1997, either mandated by legislative bodies or proposed by the Secretary-General, and the strategy to achieve those objectives.

8. In the current medium-term plan, subprogramme 1 (Development of concepts and methods) and subprogramme 7 (Co-ordination of international statistical programmes) of programme 1 (World statistics (Department of International Economic and Social Affairs)) and the subprogramme (Support of technical co-operation) of programme 2 (Technical co-operation in statistics (Department of Technical Co-operation for Development)) were assigned high priority by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-first session (1981). In accordance with the regulations governing programme planning, the Commission is to recommend priorities among the proposed subprogrammes for the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997. The Commission

may consider that among the five subprogrammes proposed for the forthcoming plan, the corresponding subprogrammes, namely (1) Developing statistical concepts and methods for use by Member States, (4) Co-ordinating international statistical programmes and (5) Support for technical co-operation in statistics and statistical data processing, be given priority. It should be noted that the functions of the Secretariat outlined in all the proposed subprogrammes are interdependent and fully integrated in concept and implementation. In setting priority among subprogrammes, the Commission should bear in mind that the medium-term plan is subject to revision every two years. Thus, the Commission will have an opportunity when it meets in 1991, as well as during the course of the plan's implementation, to revise the content and structure of the statistics programme and the assignment of priorities among subprogrammes.

9. Recommendations for changes made by the Statistical Commission will be taken into account by the Secretary-General in revising the final draft of the plan for submission to the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in 1990. This revision may affect the formal presentation of the programme narratives. As is the case with the programme budget, the approval of the medium-term plan is a prerogative of the General Assembly.

III. IMPACT OF RESOURCE LIMITATIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SECTORS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

10. At its twelfth session, the Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination requested that the Commission receive 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. Resources available to the world statistics programme of the United Nations, in terms of staff, consultancies, expert group meetings and travel, have been reduced from the level anticipated in 1987, when the Commission reviewed the work programme for the biennium 1988-1989, by decisions taken by the General Assembly and the Secretary-General as a consequence of the current financial crisis confronting the United Nations. This has resulted in some cancellations and deferments and the reformulation of some outputs. In selected areas of work, these constraints have been somewhat mitigated by support from extrabudgetary resources. The changes have been implemented, taking into account as far as possible the priority concerns previously expressed by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, international conferences, the Statistical Commission and the regional commissions.

11. With respect to proposals for organizational change in the economic and social sectors of the United Nations, the matter is still under consideration by Member States and the Secretary-General, and no proposals for organizational changes affecting the work of the Statistical Office have been made.

IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

12. Bearing in mind the information provided in section III above, the Commission may wish:

(a) To review the proposed work programme and priorities of the Statistical Office for 1990-1991 and provide comments to the Secretary-General;

(b) To make comments and recommendations on the draft medium-term plan for 1992-1997 with respect to:

(i) The proposed objectives and strategies and the proposed new subprogramme structure;

(ii) The priority to be assigned to the subprogrammes, in accordance with the relevant programme planning regulations and in the light of the relevant parts of the Secretary-General's draft introduction to the next medium-term plan (A/43/329);

(iii) Proposals for new activities and curtailments.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1987, Supplement No. 6 (E/1987/19), para. 200, and report of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination on its twelfth session (E/CN.3/1989/20), para. 48.

2/ For the revisions to the statistics programme, see A/43/6 and A/43/16 (Part I), chap. H.

3/ See ST/SGB/PPBME/Rules/1 (1987); see also the revisions adopted by the General Assembly (resolution 42/215) on the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination contained in Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/42/16), part two, para. 74, and the text on the contingency fund adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 42/211.
