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CO-ORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL  
STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

Report of the Working Group on International Statistical  
Programmes and Co-ordination on its thirteenth session

SUMMARY

At its thirteenth session, the Working Group reviewed progress and plans on the revision of the System of National Accounts (paras. 4-6) and on the International Comparison Programme (paras. 7 and 8), reviewed and finalized the provisional agenda for the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission (para. 9), made decisions and suggestions concerning the documentation and its content (paras. 11-68), reviewed comments that had been made by members of the Statistical Commission on the report of the Secretary-General on general development and integration of methodological work (E/CN.3/1989/15), which was submitted to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fifth session (paras. 69-73), reviewed co-ordination of the statistical data collection activities of international organizations, including ad hoc collection activities by non-statistical units of international organizations (paras. 74-84), considered ways to accelerate statistical development while ensuring co-ordination in selected fields of statistics (paras. 85-87) and considered possible changes to the composition of the Working Group (paras. 88-90).

\* E/CN.3/1991/1.

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The thirteenth session of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination of the Statistical Commission was held at Geneva from 11 to 14 September 1989. 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 L. A. Beccaria (Argentina) acting as Chairman of the session. Other members present were: A. M. Hallouda (Egypt), E. Oti Boateng (Ghana), H. Kudo (Japan), S. M. Ishaque (Pakistan), N. G. Belov (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and H. Habermann (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 Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), International Labour Organisation (ILO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank and International Statistical Institute (ISI).

## II. REVISION OF THE SYSTEM OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS (SNA)

4. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of an oral report from the Director of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and an informal note prepared by that Office reporting that:

(a) The Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat had engaged consultants to further elaborate and draft sections of the revised SNA on the accounting framework, satellite accounts and adaptation of SNA to special circumstances and to prepare a glossary;

(b) A meeting of the United Nations Expert Group on SNA Co-ordination had been held in New York from 12 to 21 July 1989; 12 national accounts experts from the enlarged core group of experts from developing and developed countries had participated; the Expert Group had agreed that the draft chapters (of the revised SNA) so far available substantially fulfilled the goal of clarification but that the text should be augmented by concise descriptions and the "Overview of the system" needed to be elaborated in greater detail;

(c) Regional meetings had been convened by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in June 1989 and by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) in July 1989, in preparation for the meeting of the United Nations Expert Group on SNA Co-ordination mentioned in (b) above and the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in May 1989 in preparation for the meeting of the Expert Group on the Reconciliation of SNA/MPS Standards on National Accounting and Related Matters to be held at Moscow in December 1989 [MPS: System of Balances of the National Economy];

(d) The future programme of the revision process included one more meeting of the United Nations Expert Group on SNA Co-ordination in September 1989, to review the remaining available draft chapters, the meeting of the Expert Group on the Reconciliation of SNA/MPS Standards on National Accounting and Related Matters, mentioned in (c) above and five regional meetings organized by each of the regional commissions to discuss the entire first draft of the revised SNA;

(e) The Inter-Secretariat Working Group on the SNA, at its meeting in July 1989, had agreed that the draft of the revised SNA would be distributed in January 1990, even if it was not possible for the United Nations Expert Group on SNA Co-ordination to consider all chapters of the revised SNA as originally envisaged; the draft would be translated into Spanish and French during the first months of 1990 so that it would be available in good time in the appropriate languages for the regional meetings; in the light of subsequent consultations, it was agreed that the regional commissions would be asked whether they thought a further review of the revised SNA would be necessary on their part, given its stage of development;

(f) The Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat had made provision for two expert group meetings in the biennium 1990-1991, one in 1990 and one after the Statistical Commission in 1991, in case they were necessary for completing the revision process; it was now considered likely that both meetings would be necessary;

(g) Extrabudgetary resources had been secured by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat permitting a consultant to be engaged to prepare a Handbook on Environmental Accounting, which would be issued as part of the series of Handbooks on National Accounting;

(h) In June 1989, the Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), had stressed the important role that the Handbooks would play in the practical implementation of the revised SNA after its adoption and considered that the Handbooks needed to be available with, or shortly after, the publication of the revised SNA; the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on the SNA would review plans developed by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat for the preparation of the Handbooks and that Office would report on the matter to the Statistical Commission.

5. The Working Group recognized that, in view of the far-reaching importance of the revised SNA, care should be taken not to rush the process so that adequate time would be provided for regional and global views to be taken into account. Indeed, there was now some uncertainty as to whether the documentation that would be available to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-sixth session in February 1991 would be sufficiently well developed and reviewed, and available sufficiently in advance of the session to support adoption of the revised SNA by the Commission at that time. The situation would depend upon the work to be completed between now and the Commission session and the views of the regional commissions which would review the draft during 1990. The Working Group considered that appropriate attention should be paid to environmental accounting and that this would involve including a consideration of environmental accounting within the

revised SNA and a more detailed exposition of it in the planned Handbook on Environmental Accounting. In this connection, the Working Group was informed that the World Bank, as part of its research programme, would be carrying out national case-studies in this area. The Working Group agreed that the revised SNA should include coverage of questions of a general nature on the integration of SNA and MPS and noted that the scope of the coverage would in part be determined by the meeting of the Expert Group in December 1989 (see para. 4 (c) and (d) above).

6. The Working Group agreed that the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat should delay the completion of the Comparisons of the System of National Accounts and the System of Balances of the National Economy: Conceptual Relationships until after the completion of the revised SNA and also emphasized that high priority should be assigned to completion of the Handbooks on National Accounting.

### III. INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON PROGRAMME (ICP)

7. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of an oral report from the Director of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat of the discussions and conclusions of the meeting of the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on the ICP held in New York on 10 and 11 July 1989. The Working Group was informed that:

(a) Phase V of the International Comparison Programme, with 1985 as reference year, was nearing completion; regional comparisons had been completed for the European Economic Community (EEC), OECD, the European Comparison, Africa and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) region; the results for the Caribbean region were not available and the interregional links (core comparisons) were not yet final;

(b) The results of the regional comparisons had, in general, improved except for the absence of a Latin American regional comparison in phase V; the greatest weakness of the phase V world comparison was the low number of interregional (core) comparisons, which meant that the results of comparisons between countries belonging to different regions had to be treated with caution; however, some studies were being carried out by EEC that might permit at least some indication to be obtained of the magnitude of uncertainty introduced by this factor;

(c) Regional comparisons for phase VI, with 1990 as reference year, had already started in EEC, OECD and Eastern Europe; several additional countries with centrally planned economies were participating for the first time;

(d) The Inter-American Development Bank had offered substantial support for an Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) regional comparison, although it was not yet known what form that comparison would take since to date only five ECLAC countries had expressed interest in participating in this exercise; Japan was considering providing some support for the ESCAP comparisons and EEC for the African comparisons; however, details of the

arrangements had not been formulated yet; the most critical problem for phase VI was the lack of resources to carry out appropriately the interregional linking;

(e) Various ways of overcoming the reluctance of some countries to serve as core comparators were also considered; one of the possibilities was to replace the core country method by a core product method; in this latter case each region would be asked to price not only the regional specifications but also a given number of "core" specifications; however, any method of linkage would require additional resources which, for the time being, had not been offered by any sponsor; it was not possible, therefore, to make a formal commitment at this stage for organizing the phase VI exercise as a world comparison; however, efforts were continuing to obtain additional resources;

(f) With regard to future activity of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat on the ICP, a Handbook on the ICP would be produced jointly with EEC, efforts on global monitoring of regional work on ICP would continue, support to developing country regional comparisons would also continue and efforts at the promotion of global co-ordination and dissemination would be maintained.

8. The Working Group took note of the report on ICP and in particular the resource problem for supporting global comparisons. In this connection, the Working Group considered that the "product approach", while interesting, should not be considered as an alternative to core country comparisons but as a supplementary approach to core country comparisons and the regional approach.

#### IV. PROVISIONAL AGENDA AND DOCUMENTATION FOR THE TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION

9. The Working Group endorsed the provisional agenda that had been approved by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fifth session and by the Economic and Social Council at its first regular session of 1989 by its decision 1989/115. The Working Group also made the following additions:

(a) It added a sub-item 9 (b), Civil registration and vital statistics, in response to expressions of interest from a large number of Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations;

(b) It added a sub-item 9 (f), Human settlements statistics, in response to resolution 12/6 entitled "Compendium on human settlements statistics", adopted by the Commission on Human Settlements at its twelfth session;

(c) It added a sub-item 11 (d), Co-ordination issues related to the National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP), the Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) project and the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS), reflecting the concern that the Statistical Commission had expressed on this matter at its twenty-fifth session.

10. In line with previous practice, the Working Group discussed the documentation that had been prepared for the twenty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission.

The Working Group considered that the quality of the documents had been very high. However, the Working Group recalled that some of the documents had not been made available on a sufficiently timely basis and this made it difficult for Commission members to prepare well for the session. The Working Group reiterated the emphasis that the Commission had placed on having all the documents available in all the languages well in advance of the twenty-sixth session. That was considered especially important for the documentation under items 4, National accounts and balances, 12, Co-ordination and integration of international statistical programmes and 13, Programme questions, in order to allow representatives adequate time for preparation. 1/

11. The Working Group approved the outlines and descriptive notes of the documents for each agenda item, as set out in a restricted document entitled "Proposals and outlines for documentation for the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission" and as provided orally, with the additions, changes and comments set out below. The agreed chapter headings are set out in the following paragraphs.

Agenda item 3. Special issues

Agenda item 3 (a). Increasing user awareness of the value of statistical outputs and services

Document: Report on increasing user awareness of the value of statistical outputs and services

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. USER AWARENESS AND USE OF STATISTICS
- II. SELECTED NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE: PROBLEMS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS
- III. STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING USER AWARENESS
- IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

12. The Working Group noted that this document would be based on a survey of national experience and would serve as a vehicle for disseminating that experience for the benefit of all national and international statistical services.

Agenda item 3 (b). Implications of structural adjustment and the debt crisis for national statistical services and international statistical work and statistical needs related to the international development strategy for the fourth United Nations development decade

13. The Working Group agreed that the title for this document should be shortened as follows: "Effects of structural adjustment programmes and debt burden on the work programmes of national and international statistical services".

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

I. STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND DEBT CRISIS

II. INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE FOURTH UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT DECADE

III. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

14. The Working Group noted that the basic objective of this document was to make national and international statistical services aware of overall developments in structural adjustment and the debt crisis and in the fourth United Nations development decade and the implications for these services. The Working Group also noted that the report would be prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat with inputs from the regional commissions, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other organizations.

15. The Working Group considered that the introduction should cover a number of general questions on structural adjustment and the debt crisis and the nature of foreign debt to give a basic understanding of the problem and its magnitude. The Working Group noted and understood that this would be based on existing analytical studies and reports. Chapter I should stress the impact on national statistical offices and international statistical offices of structural adjustment and the debt crisis in terms of the short-term and long-term curtailment of ongoing and planned statistical programmes, as well as data needs and other requirements such as technological and programmatic needs, generated by the situation. Thus it was stressed that chapter I should cover both the positive and the negative impacts of structural adjustment. It should also include coverage of the implications for economic and financial statistics. Chapter II should address the needed data and data systems for monitoring and evaluating the development strategy. It should be broad, to cover not only elements of the development strategy related to economic growth alone, but also to cover the human development aspects. As in chapter I, it should include the impacts on the national statistical offices and international statistical services, as well as the data needs resulting from the strategy. It should review survey strategy, methodology and survey instruments proposed in the context of the United Nations development decade initiatives measured against those that evolved to monitor the impact of structural adjustment and debt crisis.

16. The Working Group noted that the document would not cover surveys alone but the full range of data collection methods and the full range of subjects. The analysis would draw on the experience of experts from the regional commissions and the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat relating to countries with which they are familiar, rather than on a systematic analysis of country experiences. The Working Group considered that the document should focus on general considerations rather than on issues at the detailed level. It should also address the importance of understanding user needs and providing the data that can help the policy maker. The Working Group requested the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat to ensure appropriate cross-referencing to the document under agenda item 3 (a), Increasing user awareness of the value of statistical outputs and services, and documents under other agenda items. The Working Group welcomed the possibility that this document could be supplemented by background papers from the World Bank and IMF on their programmes in debt statistics.

Agenda item 4. National accounts and balances

Agenda item 4 (a). System of National Accounts (SNA)

17. The Working Group recalled its discussion of the revision of SNA, as set out in paragraphs 4 to 6 above.

First document: Report on progress made in the review of the System of National Accounts (SNA)

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. WORK PROGRAMME OF THE SNA REVIEW
- II. OVERVIEW OF CONCEPTUAL CHANGES IN THE REVISED SNA
- III. HANDBOOKS OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTING
- IV. PROPOSED PROGRAMME FOR SNA IMPLEMENTATION
- V. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

18. The Working Group noted that this document was intended to serve, *inter alia*, as a covering note for the "Draft of the revised System of National Accounts" (see eighth document below). The Working Group also noted that this item would include the development of environmental satellite accounts, which would be described in the document entitled "Report on progress made in the development of environment statistics and future plans" listed under agenda item 9 (e), Environment statistics.

19. The Working Group requested that chapters II or IV include an evaluation of the extent to which the stated objectives of the revision of SNA have been met. The Working Group understood that such an assessment would be preliminary and that the Secretariat looked to the Statistical Commission itself and others to do an



overall evaluation: Chapter IV should include an assessment of the assistance that countries would need to implement the revised SNA. This should cover such elements as training, fellowships, technical advisory services and software and should include a broad statement of resources needed, if possible. This assessment would be based, in part, on information to be included in the reports of the regional commission expert groups (see paras. 21-23 below).

20. The Working Group also requested that the document report on consultations with users on the draft of the revised SNA. The Working Group noted that the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat was proceeding on the basis that the primary responsibility for consulting with users was with the national statistical offices and in fact many national experts had already carried out such consultations. The international statistical services were also consulting with users in their organizations and with other user groups and individuals. In addition, such non-governmental organizations as the International Association for Research on Income and Wealth, whose membership comprised both users and producers of national accounts, had given substantial attention to the SNA review at each stage. Accordingly, the Working Group requested that the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat stress in its communications with national and international statistical offices the importance of their consulting with users and reflecting those consultations in their inputs to the regional expert meetings (see paras. 21-23 below).

Second through sixth documents:

Report of the Working Party of the Conference of European Statisticians on the System of National Accounts

Report of the Economic Commission for Africa Expert Group Meeting on the System of National Accounts

Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Expert Group Meeting on the System of National Accounts

Report of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean Expert Group Meeting on the System of National Accounts

Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia Expert Group Meeting on the System of National Accounts

21. The Working Group agreed that consideration of the results of the regional meetings by the Statistical Commission would be facilitated if the reports to the Commission were to have a standardized structure. The Working Group agreed that a useful structure would be one in which the first part of the report would be structured according to the wishes of each regional meeting, reflecting the discussion at the meeting, and the second part would have a standard structure, with the following section headings:

- A. General conclusions on the draft of the revised SNA
- B. Conclusions on main changes proposed in the draft of the revised SNA
- C. Conclusions on topics of special concern to the region
- D. Conclusions regarding the implementation of the SNA
- E. Other conclusions and proposals

22. It was understood that section D would cover assistance needed by countries to ensure efficient and effective implementation of the revised SNA. The Working Group recalled its conclusion set out in paragraph 20 above that participants at the regional meetings should reflect their consultations with users in their inputs to these regional meetings.

23. Many members of the Working Group expressed the need to have an overall summary of the conclusions of the regional meetings available for the Statistical Commission to help in its review. While recognizing that a formal document was not possible, the Working Group requested the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat to provide an informal report containing, as far as possible, a summary of the conclusions. This report would be supplemented by a substantial oral report to the Commission containing a synthesis of those conclusions.

Seventh document: Report of the meeting of the Expert Group on the Reconciliation of SNA/MPS Standards on National Accounting and Related Activities

24. The Working Group noted that the meeting, to be held in Moscow from 4 to 9 December 1989, would bring together experts in national accounting from countries with centrally planned economies and market economies and would include participants from developed and developing countries. The Working Group amended the title of the report to that shown above to reflect the current title of the expert group.

Eighth document: Draft of the revised System of National Accounts

25. The Working Group noted that, subject to further consultations by the Expert Group on SNA Co-ordination, the planned chapters and annexes of the draft were as follows:

#### CHAPTERS

- I. INTRODUCTION
- II. OVERVIEW OF THE SYSTEM
- III. INSTITUTIONAL UNITS AND RESIDENCE

- IV. SECTORS AND SUBSECTORS OF THE SYSTEM
- V. PRODUCTION ACCOUNTS
- VI. FINAL EXPENDITURES
- VII. PRODUCTION ACCOUNTS BY INDUSTRY AND THE INPUT-OUTPUT TABLES
- VIII. TAXES AND OTHER TRANSFERS
- IX. FACTOR INCOMES AND PROPERTY INCOMES
- X. CAPITAL AND FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS
- XI. BALANCE SHEETS AND NET WORTH
- XII. PRICE AND VOLUME CHANGES
- XIII. SATELLITE ACCOUNTS AND ADAPTATION OF THE INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK TO VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES AND NEEDS
- XIV. ACCOUNTING RULES

#### ANNEXES

- I. SNA MATRIX
- II. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SNA AND RELATED SYSTEMS OF STATISTICS: BALANCE OF PAYMENTS, GOVERNMENT FINANCE STATISTICS, MONEY AND BANKING STATISTICS AND THE SYSTEM OF BALANCES OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY
- III. TABLE SHOWING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRESENT AND REVISED SNA
- IV. POPULATION AND EMPLOYMENT
- V. CHANGE IN STOCKS AND HOLDING GAINS
- VI. LEASING OF EQUIPMENT AND RENTING OF BUILDINGS

26. The Working Group considered that it was essential that the draft of the revised SNA be available well in advance of the Statistical Commission session and in all the official languages of the Commission.

Agenda item 4 (b). System of Balances of the National Economy (MPS)

Document: Report on any elaboration of MPS considered by the expert group meeting convened by the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) in 1989

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. PROGRESS IN THE WORK ON THE ELABORATION OF MPS
- II. STUDY OF NATIONAL PRACTICES IN THE COMPILATION OF MATERIAL BALANCES
- III. PROPOSED FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK
- IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

27. The Working Group noted that this document would be prepared by CMEA, which had provided the above outline.

Agenda item 4 (c). Links between the System of National Accounts (SNA) and the System of Balances of the National Economy (MPS)

Document: Report on the progress made in the harmonization of the System of National Accounts (SNA) and the System of Balances of the National Economy (MPS)

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. PROGRESS TOWARDS INTEGRATION OF SNA AND MPS
- II. REVISION OF THE COMPARISONS OF THE SYSTEM OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS AND THE SYSTEM OF BALANCES OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY, PART ONE, CONCEPTUAL RELATIONSHIPS
- III. PROPOSED FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK
- IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

28. The Working Group noted that this document would draw on the conclusions of the meeting of the Expert Group on the Reconciliation of SNA/MPS Standards on National Accounting and Related Activities and would report on progress subsequent to that meeting. The Working Group decided that the report of that Expert Group should be listed under items 4 (a), System of National Accounts (SNA) and 4 (c), Links between the System of National Accounts (SNA) and the System of Balances of the National Economy (MPS) in the Commission's agenda. The Working Group recalled its earlier decision that the publication referred to in chapter II of the outline above would be delayed as work could be completed on it only after the revision of SNA had been completed (see para. 6 above).

Agenda item 5. International economic classifications

Document: Report on the progress of work on the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE)

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. INFORMAL WORKING GROUPS ON THE INTERNATIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF STATUS IN EMPLOYMENT (ICSE)
  - A. Uses of the classification of status in employment
  - B. Problems in applying existing classifications
- II. NATIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS OF STATUS IN EMPLOYMENT: DETAILED ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
  - A. Concepts and structures of classifications
  - B. Diverse economic conditions and classification needs
- III. FUTURE WORK
- IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

29. The Working Group noted that this document would be prepared by the International Labour Office, which had provided the above outline. The Working Group agreed that it would be useful to include in the report the longer-term work programme leading to consideration of the draft classification by both the Statistical Commission and the International Conference of Labour Statisticians. The Working Group requested that the document, in addition to presenting information on national practices, discuss some of the major substantive issues involved in the revision and provide an indication of some of the characteristics that the revision may have, including presenting provisional proposals so that the Commission's guidance could be obtained at an early stage of developing proposals for a revised classification.

Agenda item 6. Service statistics

First document: Report on the work done by national and international agencies in the field of service statistics.

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. PROGRESS IN THE FIELD OF STATISTICS OF TRADE IN SERVICES
- II. PROGRESS IN THE FIELD OF QUANTITY AND PRICE INDICES OF SERVICES

III. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN SERVICE STATISTICS

IV. PROPOSED FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK

V. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

30. The Working Group requested the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat to contact the regional commissions for information on their relevant activities to include in chapter I and agreed that chapter III could report on developments, if any, on international agreement on a uniform definition of the concept of services.

Second document: Report on a substantive topic prepared by the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics

31. The Working Group noted that the Voorburg Group would meet in Ottawa from 2 to 5 October 1989 and would consider, inter alia, the topic to be selected for this document. The Working Group emphasized that the document should be a report on a substantive topic.

Agenda item 7. Price statistics

Document: Report on developments in phase VI of the International Comparison Programme (ICP) and on other related international comparison issues

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. FINALIZATION OF THE PHASE V (1985) COMPARISON
- II. PROGRESS IN THE PHASE VI (1990) COMPARISON
- III. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES
- IV. ORGANIZATIONAL AND FINANCIAL PROBLEMS OF ICP
- V. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

32. The Working Group recalled its discussion of the ICP as set out in paragraphs 7 and 8 above. The Working Group requested that chapters I and II include a review of the experience of organizations and other users in using ICP results and noted that the World Bank would provide information on its experiences. The Working Group agreed that the points for discussion should include, inter alia, (a) the question of integrating ICP into the regular national statistical programme of a country and linking it with SNA; this was seen as one mechanism for enhancing the interest of national statistical offices in participating in the Programme; and (b) the relationship between ICP and other work on price statistics at the international level. The Working Group was of the view that the Commission should take note under this item of the work on prices reported

in the documents on SNA and service statistics and that, following discussion at the twenty-sixth session, the Commission might wish to consider price statistics more broadly at a future session.

Agenda item 8. Industrial statistics

Document: Report on the effectiveness of the 1983 World Programme of Industrial Statistics

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

I. REVIEW OF THE 1983 WORLD PROGRAMME IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS PURPOSES

- A. Outcome of the 1983 Programme as compared to the 1973 Programme
- B. Effectiveness of the 1983 Programme in encouraging bench-mark enumerations
- C. Impact of training workshops

II. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE NEXT WORLD PROGRAMME

III. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

33. The Working Group welcomed information given by the Director of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat on preliminary considerations for the next World Programme of Industrial Statistics and noted that these would be circulated to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the regional commissions and other organizations for comment in the near future. These considerations covered such matters as (a) fixed year or fixed periodicity for the Programme; (b) the adequacy of existing recommendations and the possible need for supplementary recommendations and other technical documentation, including software, for such matters as the implementation of the revised International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC), the construction of index numbers of industrial production, treatment of household and small-scale industries, the possible expansion of the scope of bench-mark collection efforts to include services, as well as the production activities traditionally covered; and (c) technical co-operation needs. The Working Group requested that these and other relevant considerations, including the relationship between bench-mark data collection provided by the Programme and current collection of industrial statistics, be reflected in chapter II.

Agenda item 9. Demographic, social and environment statistics

Agenda item 9 (a). Population and housing censuses

34. In view of its decision to have a separate document on agenda item 9 (b) (see para. 36 below) and the stage reached in the 1985-1994 census decade, the Working Group decided that a separate document should not be prepared on population and

housing censuses but that the subject should be treated in a separate chapter in the document listed under agenda item 10, Development and integration of methodological work. That chapter should have the outline as proposed in the restricted document and which is set out below.

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION
  - A. Activities at the global level
  - B. Activities at the regional level
  - C. Activities at the national level
- II. ESTABLISHMENT OF CENSUS DATA BASES FOR 1990 CENSUSES
  - A. Methodological developments
  - B. Scope and topics of data bases
- III. TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION NEEDS AND ACTIVITIES
  - A. Training needs for post-censal evaluation
  - B. Other technical co-operation needs for the 1990 censuses
- IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

35. The Working Group emphasized that this decision on documentation should not be perceived as reflecting any reduction in the priority attached to this important subject and that the subject should be treated at appropriate length in the document.

Agenda item 9 (b). Civil registration and vital statistics

Document: Progress report on civil registration and vital statistics

36. In view of the wide interest expressed in this subject by Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations and because it had not been considered by the Statistical Commission since 1981, the Working Group decided that a separate report should be prepared for this item, rather than including the subject as a chapter in the document under agenda item 10, Development and integration of methodological work, where it might otherwise have been placed.



## Chapter headings:

## INTRODUCTION

- I. PROGRESS IN CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SINCE 1981
- II. ISSUES IN AND EMERGING ADVANCES CONDUCTIVE TO IMPROVING VITAL STATISTICS
  - A. Issues in improving vital statistics
  - B. Advances in data processing technology and dissemination
- III. TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION NEEDS AND ACTIVITIES
  - A. Training and other needs
  - B. International programme to accelerate the improvement of vital statistics
- IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

37. The Working Group noted that this report would be prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat in collaboration with UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WHO and with help from the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics (IIVRS). The Working Group agreed that chapter II, section A, should include a consideration of the need for, value of and uses of statistics from civil registration, especially for developing countries, and also some of the administrative uses of civil registration.

Agenda item 9 (c). Social statistics and indicators

38. The Working Group decided to eliminate the first document originally requested under this item, namely, "Report on co-ordination of statistical programmes for social indicators" and to incorporate the subject of that document, as appropriate, in the second document requested, namely, "Report on progress made in the development of a co-ordinated United Nations system data base for selected social statistics and indicators of common interest at the national and international levels", which is outlined below and in reports called for under agenda item 10, Development and integration of methodological work, and agenda item 12, Co-ordination and integration of international statistical programmes.

39. The Working Group amended the proposed title to read as follows: "Report on progress made in the development of a co-ordinated United Nations system data base for selected social statistics and indicators of common interest and the development of related national data bases".

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION: THE CONCEPT OF AN INTERNATIONAL DATA BASE IN SOCIAL STATISTICS

I. EVALUATION OF COMMON SOCIAL STATISTICS REQUIREMENTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

- A. Programme monitoring
- B. Development objectives
- C. Technical co-operation and development assistance
- D. International strategies and events

II. CURRENT INTERNATIONAL COMPILATION AND CO-ORDINATION ARRANGEMENTS

III. TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR COMPILATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

IV. METHODS TO IDENTIFY SERIES TO BE INCLUDED AND HARMONIZATION OF REQUIRED CLASSIFICATIONS

- A. Population and families, health, education and culture
- B. Labour force, income, consumption, investment and poverty
- C. Series concerning children, women, disabled persons, the elderly and other special population groups
- D. Other social series
- E. Other related economic and environment series

V. CONCLUSIONS

VI. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

40. The Working Group agreed that the document should address the set of activities needed for the establishment and compilation of data bases at the national level, in addition to those needed to develop the proposed international data base. It emphasized that in both the national and the international situation the data base must be relevant to needs, including policy needs, and capable of reflecting significant changes in social conditions. With regard to the United Nations system data base, the Working Group agreed that the emphasis should be on including in the data base, series on internationally agreed on quantitative goals and targets so as to contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of national and international social and other development efforts. The Working Group also noted that the proposed international data base was a limited one and that individual agencies would have much more extensive data bases in their own area of concern.

The Working Group also stressed the importance of co-ordination between the proposed United Nations system data base and the individual data bases of each agency. The Working Group considered that there may be additional concerns at the national level compared to the international level, for example, the need for sub-national data and a greater level of detail.

41. The Working Group recommended that the paper should try to describe what was required to meet the specific needs in the national and international situations. This should encompass operational, technical and conceptual aspects, the selection of indicators from various sectors and their organization into a coherent whole, and the identification of the necessary co-ordination at the national and international levels. The document should also emphasize the need to provide assistance at the national level in the organization and development of the needed statistics. The point was made that developing countries would need operational manuals to help them with the development and maintenance of data bases, particularly a manual presenting clear guidance on the selection of indicators for a general-purpose data base for use in the overall monitoring of social goals and the fourth United Nations development decade.

42. The Working Group agreed that the introduction should place the data base effort into the context of other programmes of social statistics. This aspect would also be an important part of chapter II. The Working Group noted that since this document dealt with monitoring and evaluating the human condition, it would have considerable interrelationship with the document under agenda item 3 (b). Moreover, it agreed that co-ordination issues related to the use of household surveys to generate the needed data would be discussed under agenda item 11 (d), Co-ordination issues related to the National Household Survey Capability Programme, the Social Dimensions of Adjustment project and the Living Standards Measurement Study. The Working Group recognized that the outline might need to be changed by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat to allow it to reflect the requested amendments to the document to cover national data bases, as well as the international data base.

43. The representative of the World Bank requested that the document deal with the reservations that had been expressed by the World Bank at the twenty-third session of the ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities, held at Geneva from 19 to 23 June 1989, under the agenda item entitled "Monitoring achievement of social goals in the 1990s". Those reservations concerned various aspects of the data compilation and development activities that were expected to be a part of the programme described in the document (see ACC/1989/PG/6, paras. 57-62).

Agenda item 9 (d). Patterns of consumption: qualitative aspects of development

Document: Final report on the case-studies carried out by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development on qualitative aspects of development and on the results of the planned international statistical meeting on the subject

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

I. BACKGROUND

II. SUMMARY RESULTS OF COUNTRY CASE-STUDIES

India

Kenya

Morocco

III. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS FROM COUNTRY CASE-STUDIES

IV. RESULTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL MEETING IN MOROCCO ON PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION

V. CO-ORDINATION WITH RELATED NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES

VI. FUTURE WORK

VII. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

44. The Working Group noted that this document would be prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. The Working Group also noted that, although this document responded appropriately to a specific request from the Statistical Commission <sup>2/</sup> and to resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council (resolution 1987/6 of 26 May 1987) and the General Assembly (resolution 40/179 of 17 December 1985), the discussion at the twenty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission had been broader. <sup>3/</sup> UNRISD considered that its programme could be broadened in the future. The Working Group emphasized the relationship between this project and other statistical programmes. This would be covered in chapter V and would involve cross-referencing to other documents for the Commission and in particular the document under agenda item 9 (c), Social statistics and indicators. The Working Group welcomed the information that the international meeting on the subject was tentatively planned for May 1990, with the Government of Morocco acting as host, and would be preceded by a technical meeting of international organizations and others in December 1989. The Working Group also welcomed information on the new UNRISD project on estimates of socio-economic data in current international use.

Agenda item 9 (e). Environment statistics

First document: Report on methods of environment statistics developed under the work programme of the Conference of European Statisticians

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORK OF THE CONFERENCE IN THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS
- II. DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARD CONCEPTS, DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS
- III. METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS
- IV. DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL DATA SERVICE
- V. PERSPECTIVES FOR FUTURE WORK

45. The Working Group noted that this document would be prepared by the Economic Commission for Europe, which had provided the above outline. The Working Group requested ECE to give special attention to chapters II and III of the outline. In this connection, it requested ECE to provide descriptions of the various relevant classifications and other aspects of methodology that had been adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians and, wherever feasible, also include the classifications themselves in the body of the paper or as an annex. The Working Group also requested ECE to include information on experiences to date on the use of those classifications and other aspects of methodology, with a view to assisting the Commission in identifying one or more classifications or other methodological outputs of the Conference of European Statisticians that may be particularly appropriate for international adaptation and use. The Working Group considered that presentation of the report in this way, with appropriate points for discussion, would help the Statistical Commission assess the relevance of the ECE work as a basis for developing classifications and other aspects of methodology at the world level in this field.

Second document: Report on progress made in the development of environment statistics and future plans

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. METHODOLOGICAL WORK
- II. CO-OPERATION AND CO-ORDINATION
- III. COMPILATION AND DISSEMINATION OF ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS

IV. PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORK

V. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

46. The Working Group welcomed the steps taken by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat towards, and the positive responses from, countries for establishing a "Voorburg type" group for environment statistics along the lines suggested by the Statistical Commission and consistent with the requirements set by the Commission, which called for any such endeavour to preserve the co-ordinating role of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and provide for participation by developing countries. 4/ It also welcomed the joint project of the World Bank, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat on environmental accounting. The Working Group recalled its discussion of the relevance of this latter project to agenda item 4 (a), System of National Accounts. The Working Group agreed that this document should be broad in its coverage to include the work of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, other international organizations and selected non-governmental organizations and to include illustrative developments at the national level. With regard to non-governmental organizations, specific reference was made to the work of the World Resources Institute and the International Association of Official Statisticians. The Working Group also agreed that the points for discussion should include a consideration of the compilation of environmental statistics at the global level.

Agenda item 9 (f). Human settlements statistics

47. The Working Group decided that the documentation for this item should be provided in chapter II, section E, of the planned report under agenda item 10, Development and integration of methodological work. That section, entitled "Housing and human settlements statistics", would review the current methodological work and the future direction of the work in the light of the mandated reduction in resources in the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, taking account of the views expressed by the Commission on Human Settlements at its twelfth session (see resolution 12/6). The Working Group welcomed the ongoing consultations between the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) concerning various alternatives for co-operative efforts aimed at continuing compilation and dissemination of human settlements statistics, although the Working Group recognized the possibility that data collected in the immediate future might not be as detailed as previously.

Agenda item 10. Development and integration of methodological work

Document: Report on the general development and integration of methodological work, including experience and progress made in international classifications

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. SUMMARY REVIEW OF METHODOLOGICAL WORK
- II. ONGOING AND FUTURE WORK IN SELECTED AREAS
  - A. International classifications
  - B. Energy statistics
  - C. International trade and transport statistics
  - D. Population and housing censuses
  - E. Housing and human settlements statistics
  - F. Statistical programmes for social indicators
- III. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

48. The Working Group considered that this document served well the purpose of keeping the Commission informed of developments in methodological work in certain fields which were important but which did not call for separate documents at this time.

Agenda item 11. Technical co-operation

Agenda item 11 (a). Technical co-operation in statistics

Document: Report on technical co-operation in statistics

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION PROGRAMMES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM
- II. OTHER MULTILATERAL AND BILATERAL TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION PROGRAMMES
- III. ISSUES IN STATISTICAL TRAINING
- IV. ISSUES IN STATISTICAL DATA PROCESSING AND INFORMATICS
- V. PRIORITIES
- VI. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

49. The Working Group decided that the information in chapters I and II describing technical co-operation activities should be presented in as concise and abbreviated a manner as possible and more detailed descriptions should be included in the Directory of Technical Co-operation. Chapters III and IV should contain descriptions of problems and issues, rather than simply a description of activities. The Working Group recognized the increasing importance of training in administration and management of national statistics services and asked that this be covered in chapter III. This chapter should also include aspects of technical co-operation among developing countries, should consider the necessary mutually supportive relationships between training at the global, regional and country levels, the need to train statisticians to develop and maintain close links with users and the need for horizontal co-operation at the national level. The Working Group also noted the joint project of ECE and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on statistical computing and requested that it be referred to in chapter IV.

50. The Working Group decided that a new chapter V should be introduced on priorities for statistical development. The chapter on priorities should: (a) discuss priorities, in so far as possible, in terms of those established by the recipient countries, the multilateral and bilateral donor agencies and various international programmes with technical co-operation components, (b) include cross-references to other documents for the Statistical Commission that set out some aspects of future plans, emerging needs and problems, as this would give the paper a more forward-looking approach and (c) address the need to enhance the quality of data and the analytical use of statistics. The Working Group noted that improving the quality of data and analysis should also be important objectives of training programmes in every field of statistics. To facilitate the discussion on priorities, the Working Group requested the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat to include a question on priorities in the request for contributions sent to organizations and countries in connection with the preparation of the document. The Working Group also requested the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat to examine the feasibility of having a single, consolidated request for information on technical co-operation activities to serve the needs of the present document and the Directory of Technical Co-operation. In addition, the Working Group noted that several agencies had carried out specific studies of country needs and capabilities in the field of statistics, for example the recent joint study of Africa by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), UNDP and the World Bank and the basic needs assessments carried out by UNFPA. These may be drawn on in the discussion of country priorities along with the views of the regional commissions.

51. The Working Group decided that the points for discussion should include questions on co-ordination of technical co-operation, particularly at the national level, priorities and documentation that might be needed as a basis for further discussion by the Commission at a future session. The Working Group considered that focusing discussion on these aspects at the twenty-sixth session would help identify directions for future discussion. The Working Group considered that, as in the past, the regional commissions would be a rich source of relevant information for all aspects of this report.



52. The Working Group decided that the document listed under agenda item 3 (b) should be listed under this agenda item also because of its close relevance. Other documents for the twenty-sixth session of the Commission would also be relevant, and appropriate cross-referencing would need to be made.

Agenda item 11 (b). National Household Survey Capability Programme

Document: Report on the progress of the National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP) and its co-ordination with other household survey programmes, including results of available evaluations of NHSCP

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. PROGRESS IN COUNTRY-LEVEL OPERATIONS
- II. TECHNICAL STUDIES AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES
- III. CO-ORDINATION WITH OTHER RELATED PROGRAMMES
- IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

53. The Working Group agreed that (a) chapter I should include an indication of the developments in NHSCP countries, including progress made and the kinds of further support they may need, especially for countries that have gone into the maintenance phase, in addition to quantitative information on the number of countries participating in NHSCP, and (b) chapter III should include co-ordination with other household survey programmes in addition to the Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) project and the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) of the World Bank, as well as with other statistical activities, such as the population and housing census, efforts aimed at establishing national and international data banks and monitoring social goals in the 1990s and the collection of data on household and small-scale industries. The Working Group decided to consider chapter III under agenda item 11 (d), Co-ordination issues related to the National Household Survey Capability Programme, the Social Dimensions of Adjustment project and the Living Standards Measurement Study.

Agenda item 11 (c). World Bank household survey initiatives

Document: Report on the progress of the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) and the Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) project, including fuller details of the survey methodology proposed for the SDA project and the results of available evaluations of these initiatives

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. LIVING STANDARDS MEASUREMENT STUDY

II. SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF ADJUSTMENT PROJECT

III. CO-ORDINATION BETWEEN THE WORLD BANK AND OTHER AGENCIES

IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

54. The Working Group noted that this document would be prepared by the World Bank, which had provided the above outline. The Working Group requested the World Bank to provide as full a description of methodologies as possible in chapters I and II consistent with the 24-page limit on the document and welcomed the intention of the Bank to make available to the Commission draft questionnaires and manuals as background documents. Special interest was expressed in the methodologies and questionnaires being developed for both the intensive and extensive surveys and it was considered important that the Statistical Commission be provided with enough information on these to clarify their content, scope, background and purposes. The Working Group also agreed that chapter III should include co-ordination with other household survey programmes in addition to NHSCP, as well as other aspects of co-ordination. The Working Group decided to consider chapter III under agenda item 11 (d), Co-ordination issues related to the National Household Survey Capability Programme, the Social Dimensions of Adjustment project and the Living Standards Measurement Study.

Agenda item 11 (d). Co-ordination issues related to the National Household Survey Capability Programme, the Social Dimensions of Adjustment project and the Living Standards Measurement Study

55. The Working Group decided that the documentation for this item should be chapter III of the document on NHSCP (agenda item 11 (b)) and chapter III of the document on the World Bank household survey initiatives (agenda item 11 (c)). It was understood that an important part of the co-ordination discussion would be the co-ordination between NHSCP and the SDA project and LSMS, and the annotations to the agenda should reflect this. Furthermore, the Working Group considered that this item would include co-ordination with other programmes that had household survey components, especially the relevant elements of the programme considered under agenda item 9 (c), Social statistics and indicators, and this should also be reflected in the annotations to the agenda for the Statistical Commission. Finally, it was recognized that NHSCP, SDA and LSMS each had separate sets of co-ordination issues in terms of their involvement with other, non-survey activities and these co-ordination issues should also be referred to in the annotated agenda. Such an approach was considered responsive to the concern of the Statistical Commission for co-ordination among programmes aimed at primary data collection. 5/ In this connection, the Working Group was pleased to hear of the discussions that had been taking place involving the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank on survey initiatives and the specific progress being made on co-ordination between NHSCP, SDA and LSMS, including joint country missions.

Agenda item 12. Co-ordination and integration of international statistical programmes

First document: Report of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination on its thirteenth session

56. The Working Group noted that this report would be in accordance with the agenda and discussions of the Working Group's session.

Second document: Report on the statistical work of international organizations

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

I. FOR EACH ORGANIZATION

- A. Major achievements, including new activities
- B. Activities discontinued
- C. Activities modified significantly

II. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

57. The Working Group noted that this report would also be considered under agenda item 13 (a), Programme performance and implementation.

Third document: Report on the plans of international organizations in the field of statistics

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

I. FOR EACH ORGANIZATION

- A. New activities
- B. Major changes

II. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

58. The Working Group noted that this report would also be considered under agenda item 13 (b), Programme objectives and planning.

59. The Working Group noted that for the second and third documents above, when they are considered under agenda item 12, the focus is intended to be on co-ordination aspects and when considered under items 13 (a) and 13 (b), the focus is intended to be more on the substance of the programmes.

60. The Working Group recalled that at the twenty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission it was agreed that future reporting to the Commission on the medium-term plans of international organizations in the field of statistics should be scheduled to coincide with the preparation of medium-term plans by the organizations. 6/ However, the Working Group noted that at present and for a variety of reasons there is no uniform plan period among the agencies, but that the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination was currently studying the harmonization of planning periods with a view to making recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly in 1990. However, complete uniformity among all the organizations was not considered likely. In the mean time the Working Group decided that the document should report exclusively on new additions to and major changes in existing plans.

61. The Working Group recalled the Commission's discussion at its twenty-fifth session concerning arrangements for statistical compilation in the international organizations. 7/ The Working Group considered that a useful initial response to that discussion would be the assessment of the availability of any spare capacity in the organizations for this purpose.

Agenda item 13. Programme questions

Agenda item 13 (a). Programme performance and implementation

First document: Report on the statistical work of international organizations

62. The Working Group noted that this document was outlined under agenda item 12 above.

Second document: Updated information on the work of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

I. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN AREAS COVERED BY THE AGENDA

II. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN AREAS NOT COVERED BY THE AGENDA

III. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

63. The Working Group noted the continuing value of this document for reporting on important developments on an up-to-date basis subsequent to the issuance of the other documents on the agenda and for reporting important developments in topical subjects not included on the agenda.

Agenda item 13 (b). Programme objectives and planning

First document: Draft work programme of the Statistical Office for 1992-1993, including relevant information on the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997

Chapter headings:

INTRODUCTION

- I. CONTENTS OF THE CONFERENCE ROOM PAPER ON THE PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME OF THE STATISTICAL OFFICE FOR 1992-1993
- II. CONTENTS OF THE CONFERENCE ROOM PAPER ON THE MEDIUM-TERM PLAN OF THE STATISTICAL OFFICE FOR THE PERIOD 1992-1997
- III. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

64. The Working Group noted that this document was intended to serve, inter alia, as a covering note for two conference room papers, one containing the proposed work programme for 1992-1993 and one containing information on the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, the chapter headings for which are set out below.

Conference room paper: Proposed work programme for 1992-1993

Chapter headings:

- I. Proposed work programme of the Statistical Office for 1992-1993
- II. Proposals on priorities in the work programme for 1992-1993
- III. Comparative information on the number of professional work-months assigned to each programme element for 1990-1991 and 1992-1993
- IV. Final approved outputs in the work programme for 1990-1991, the original planned timing, the stage reached in the completion and any revisions to the timing of the outputs

65. The Working Group recalled discussions of priorities and priority setting at previous sessions of the Statistical Commission, 8/ especially the difficulty of setting priorities at the programme element level, and requested the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat to present its proposals on priorities at the output level, if feasible and describe the basis or rationale for the proposed priorities. The Working Group considered that this information would assist greatly the Statistical Commission's discussion of priorities.

Conference room paper: Medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997

Chapter headings:

- I. Medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997
- II. Ways in which the medium-term plan differs from the preliminary proposals prepared for the Commission at its twenty-fifth session (E/CN.3/1989/CRP.2)

Second document: Report on the plans of international organizations in the field of statistics

66. The Working Group noted that this document was outlined under agenda item 12 above.

Agenda item 14. Draft provisional agenda for the twenty-seventh session of the Commission

67. The Working Group noted that, in accordance with rule 9 of the rules of procedure, a draft provisional agenda would be issued in advance of the twenty-sixth session and a revised draft provisional agenda would be presented to the Commission during the twenty-sixth session.

Agenda item 15. Report of the Commission on its twenty-sixth session

68. The Working Group noted that the report of the Commission on its twenty-sixth session would be prepared by the Rapporteur, with the assistance of the Secretariat.

V. GENERAL DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION OF METHODOLOGICAL WORK

69. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of an oral report from the Director of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat. The oral report summarized written comments that had been received from members of the Statistical Commission on the report of the Secretary-General on general development and integration of methodological work (E/CN.3/1989/15), which was submitted to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fifth session. 9/ That oral report superseded a restricted note that had been issued in June 1989, as additional information had become available after that note had been issued. The Director reported that:

(a) One country suggested that the methodological report be further developed to include current and planned methodological projects of all United Nations organizations for a period of about five years. The country considered that such a plan would enable the Statistical Commission to carry out its steering task efficiently in the field of methodological development and research in statistics;

(b) Comments were made by several countries regarding industrial statistics. One suggestion was for further development of methodological definitions for indicators in the area of machinery and automation statistics and, in particular, the definitions of new industrial areas of a technologically advanced kind. Support was expressed in principle for the several directions of work proposed for industrial statistics in document E/CN.3/1989/15. Another comment related to the collection of industrial statistics by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat from Member States (see para. 77 below);

(c) There was support for the planned further development of statistics of new and renewable sources of energy at the national level even though this field of statistics might not be equally relevant in all countries. One country commented

that the scope of new and renewable sources of energy should be clearly defined. It also indicated that it attached more importance to concentrating the efforts of countries and the interregional organs concerned on the development of an international energy statistical system that was consistent both in the methodological and technical aspects. This would result in reducing the data supply burden on countries and in improved international comparability of data;

(d) Support was expressed for the work outlined in document E/CN.3/1989/15 in the fields of international trade and transport statistics and population and housing censuses, and, in particular, one country suggested that work should be accelerated on drafting volume II of the Commodity Indexes to the Standard International Trade Classification, Revision 3, the proposed report on country practices in external trade statistics, and that efforts should be made to expand the country coverage of the unit value indexes of exports of machinery and equipment;

(e) Several countries had described their national practices and experiences in industrial statistics, population and housing censuses, energy statistics, international trade and transport statistics and in long-term planning of methodological work, which the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat had found useful.

70. The Working Group expressed its appreciation to members of the Statistical Commission who had provided comments.

71. The Working Group recognized the need for experimental work on expert systems and considered that this subject could be appropriate for inclusion in the new proposals that were being developed by ECE for the ECE/UNDP Statistical Computing Project. The Working Group considered it would be helpful if the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat could include a description of any ongoing international work on expert systems in particular fields in the various documents for the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission. The Working Group also urged the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and the statistical offices of other international organizations to give attention to the development of such expert systems as a part of the ongoing methodological work. In this connection, it emphasized the importance of developing country involvement in any expert groups that might be convened on expert systems, data bases and related subjects. The Working Group noted the positive practice of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat in this regard.

72. The Working Group stressed the value of exchange of information on experiences in methodological work among countries, particularly developing countries, and the role that the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, along with other international organizations, can play in facilitating that; particular reference was made to experiences in population and housing censuses, application of the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) for international trade statistics, the feasibility of applying ISIC at the four-digit level and experiments with training, including the use of videotapes. The Working Group agreed that more interaction among developing countries, including within the context of technical co-operation among developing countries, would be beneficial,

and emphasized in particular the benefit of featuring relevant expertise from developing countries in training programmes in statistics.

73. The Working Group welcomed a report from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on progress in the ASYCUDA project covering (a) the number of countries that have implemented or expressed interest in the project, (b) technical developments and (c) the training programmes offered. The Working Group welcomed the technical developments in the project aimed at substantially enhancing the system's usefulness and flexibility for providing international trade statistics for a country and for inclusion in international data bases. The Working Group decided to provide an opportunity for a discussion of progress on ASYCUDA at the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission under agenda item 10, Development and integration of methodological work. The Working Group requested that a brief report on ASYCUDA be included in chapter II, section C, of the document under that agenda item and that UNCTAD also provide a more detailed background document on the subject for the Commission. The Working Group also suggested that a demonstration of ASYCUDA at the time of the Commission session would be of interest to many countries.

#### VI. CO-ORDINATION OF THE STATISTICAL DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS /12

74. The Working Group considered the item on the basis of two restricted notes entitled "Inventory of statistical data collection activities" and "Progress report on co-ordination of statistical data collection activities by non-statistical units of international organizations".

75. The first note contained a summary of the major changes that had occurred in international statistical data collection activities in the past two years and a brief description of the data collected from countries on magnetic tape. With respect to the co-ordination of activities, the note described the exchange of completed questionnaires among the international organizations and the sharing of data in other ways such as exchange of data on computer tapes. It also contained a comprehensive listing that endeavoured to cover all questionnaires dispatched by the statistical services of the international organizations for the collection of statistics from Member States. This listing contained descriptions of current questionnaires, information on dispatch and deadline dates and an indication of the addressees for each questionnaire. The note constituted a revised version of a similar document, which had been discussed by the Working Group at its twelfth session and subsequently circulated to all national statistical offices.

76. The Working Group considered that the information contained in the inventory of statistical data collection activities was extremely valuable for promoting the co-ordination of international statistical work by helping to identify apparent duplication in data collection and to give potential data users a clear picture of the current data collection activities of the international organizations. It also welcomed the improvements that had been made in the report along the lines suggested by the Working Group at its twelfth session, by, as far as possible, including statistical questionnaires, even if the data collected served only a



limited purpose, by making the descriptions of the questionnaires more detailed in covering such things as the classifications used, units of measurement and time period coverage of data requested and by structuring annex II by months of reporting deadlines rather than months of dispatch of the questionnaires by the requesting organizations (see E/CN.3/1989/20, para. 53). However, the Working Group considered that scope still existed for further implementation of these previous suggestions.

77. The Working Group also welcomed the progress that had been made in the co-ordination of data collection activities covered by the inventory. The Working Group stated its concern about the overall burden of data supply on countries but recognized the need to take account of the uses to which the collected data were put in making any overall assessment. The Working Group recalled its discussion of agenda item 6 concerning one country's views on the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat's supplementary questionnaires for industrial statistics and the request for industrial statistics at the four-digit ISIC level (see para. 69 (b) above). That country, while supporting some reasonable revision of the coverage for industrial statistics collected by the United Nations, pointed out that the specific proposals set out in document E/CN.3/1989/15 called for more detail than the country collected, used different nomenclatures than used in the country and requested value data where the national data were in physical terms only. The country indicated that it would be unable to undertake further data collection to meet the requests, except perhaps in the years of industrial censuses. The Working Group noted that the tailoring of questionnaires to conform to the availability of statistics in different countries helped with the response burden and indicated that it would be interested in having information on the extent to which tailoring is done in the various organizations.

78. The Working Group considered that the application of microcomputer technology at the national level offered some prospects of reducing the burden and improving the response time for answering questionnaires. The Working Group noted that some collection of data by international organizations through microcomputers was operational already, including for national accounts and for general economic and social statistics for the United Nations Monthly Bulletin of Statistics. Some additional experiments were under way and the results were promising.

79. The importance of co-ordination at the country level of the responses to international questionnaires was stressed and international organizations were requested to facilitate the role of national statistical services in this by providing to the national statistical office information copies of all questionnaires that are sent to other government departments or, if institutional arrangements permit, by requesting data through the national statistical office.

80. The Working Group was informed of the procedures used in the past to reduce duplication; they involved sending the inventory to countries, receiving comments and observations of apparent duplication from them and following up these comments and observations with the concerned international organizations and reporting to the Working Group and the Statistical Commission. More general issues relating to apparent duplication were also addressed by the ACC Sub-Committee for Statistical Activities. The Working Group requested the Statistical Office of the United

Nations Secretariat to continue the past practice of circulating the inventory to countries.

81. The Working Group considered it important for organizations to publish adequate statements of their methodologies for compiling or adjusting data and making estimates in order for users to understand relationships among various sets of national data that may be made available nationally or internationally.

82. The second note reported on policy initiatives taken by the international organizations and their experiences to date with those initiatives in relation to the co-ordination of statistical data collection activities by non-statistical units of international organizations. The Working Group welcomed the fact that most organizations had instituted procedures for review of the questionnaires sent out by non-statistical units of organizations. In most cases, the procedures introduced in the various organizations generally required that questionnaires and other requests to Member States for statistical data must be cleared by the statistics division or a committee including representation from the statistics division before they are sent to Member States. The Working Group also welcomed the report of several organizations on their experiences in implementing their review procedures. Those organizations had reported reviewing various numbers of requests, but recognized that they could not be certain that compliance had been complete. This process was also helping to improve the questionnaires sent to Member States. The Working Group agreed that the results achieved to date were encouraging. However, the Working Group also took note that when the ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities met at Geneva from 19 to 23 June 1989, it expressed satisfaction with the initiatives that had been taken by organizations in this matter and welcomed the reports on experiences to date but also noted that several agencies still had some issues to resolve in developing suitable co-ordination mechanisms.

83. The Working Group noted that requests for data came to countries from a variety of sources and that the co-ordination under consideration by the Working Group related to requests that came from international organizations, including any channelled through official agency focal points in countries. In case of doubt as to whether a request was from an international organization or an individual, the Working Group urged that the national statistical office obtain formal views on the matter from the agency country focal point or the agency itself.

84. In respect of both forms of data collection referred to in paragraphs 75 and 82 above, the Working Group agreed that it would be useful for the Statistical Commission to consider, at its twenty-sixth session, recommending a draft resolution to the Economic and Social Council, in which the Council, while noting progress, would request the international organizations to strengthen the mechanisms for the co-ordination of statistical data collection by statistical divisions and the ad hoc collection by non-statistical units and would ask Member States to bring to the attention of the relevant organizations any instances of apparent duplication or excessive requests. In making this recommendation, the Working Group recalled that, while the Statistical Commission itself had addressed these questions frequently, the Economic and Social Council had not addressed them formally in many years.

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VII. IDENTIFICATION OF WAYS TO ACCELERATE STATISTICAL DEVELOPMENT  
WHILE ENSURING CO-ORDINATION IN SELECTED FIELDS OF STATISTICS

85. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of an oral report from the Director of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat. In the report he outlined (a) areas in which statistical development is required and co-ordination is an important element, (b) initiatives and experiments undertaken in selected fields to promote statistical development and (c) conditions considered essential for initiatives and experiments to be successful. The Director emphasized that in selecting some areas for consideration under this item there was no implication that methodological development and co-ordination were not important in other areas, but rather that these areas had particular problems where the Statistical Commission had identified that additional methodological work was needed and involved co-ordination. The areas covered were the System of National Accounts and the System of Balances of the National Economy, environment statistics, service statistics and data bases and related issues in data processing and informatics. Initiatives that had been taken to encourage needed methodological work were (a) the use of outputs of regional commissions as a basis for global work, (b) the use of global working groups of volunteering countries, (c) temporary assignment of staff by Member States to carry out the work, (d) extrabudgetary financial support and (e) co-operative efforts among international organizations to share the work. The Director reiterated the principles that had been set down by the Statistical Commission for these kinds of initiatives, namely, that the leadership and co-ordinating role of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat should be preserved and that the mechanism should be inclusive to ensure that all interested countries, including, in particular, developing countries, could participate. <sup>10/</sup> The Director indicated that experience to date was mixed, with some successes in some areas and with only limited progress in other efforts.

86. The Working Group expressed its support for the initiatives described as they were contributing to speeding up statistical development, although it recognized that some of the initiatives were new and of an experimental character. The Working Group encouraged the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat to continue these attempts to accelerate development and decided that the next Statistical Commission or Working Group session should review the benefits and problems presented by these arrangements and their possible applicability in other areas. It considered that by that time adequate experience would have been accumulated to permit a more substantial evaluation.

87. In the context of statistical development, the Working Group considered the impact that changes in the nature of economic activity, production processes and institutional arrangements and other phenomena have on information requirements and methods of assembling information. It was observed that analysis of the impacts of changes of these kinds required additional or new data and provided an impetus and pressure for methodological development. The Working Group considered that the Statistical Commission might wish to consider this matter as a special topic at its twenty-seventh session. The Working Group also considered that it would be useful if the International Statistical Institute could consider at one of its future

sessions the topic "Changes in the nature of economic activity and how these affect official statistics and statistical methodologies".

#### VIII. COMPOSITION OF THE WORKING GROUP

88. The matter was discussed on the basis of an oral report from the Director of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat. The Working Group noted the historical development of the composition of the Working Group since it was originally established in May 1968. The initial membership had been established by the Economic and Social Council and consisted of the Chairman and two additional members of the Commission (see Economic and Social Council resolution 1306 (XLIV) of 31 May 1968). At its seventeenth session, in November 1972, the Commission had discussed the composition of the Working Group with particular regard to the statistical requirements of the Second United Nations Development Decade (1970s). The Commission decided that the Working Group should be composed of the members of the Commission's Bureau, that is, the Chairman, the two Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur; the representatives to the Commission of the two major contributors to the budget of the United Nations; and one representative to the Commission from a developing country from among the members of each of the following regional commissions: ESCAP, ECLAC, and ECA, unless they were already represented in the Bureau. <sup>11/</sup> The basic aim here was to ensure representation on the Working Group of representatives from developing countries. At the same time the Commission agreed that if any of the representatives of a developing country were unable to participate in a particular session of the Working Group their places should be taken by alternates (specified by the Statistical Commission). <sup>12/</sup> The composition of the Working Group had been automatically adjusted by the Commission subsequently when three Vice-Chairmen were elected to the Commission and when the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was established, so that currently the Working Group consisted of the officers of the Commission, that is, the Chairman, the three Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur; the representatives to the Commission of the two major contributors to the budget of the United Nations, unless they were already represented in the Bureau; and one representative to the Commission from a developing country from among the members of each of the following: ESCAP, ECLAC, ECA and ESCWA, unless they were already represented in the Bureau.

89. The Working Group considered it appropriate to increase the criteria for selecting members of the Working Group in order to (a) ensure that the Working Group had a more complete representation of countries at different levels of development and with different economic and statistical systems and (b) ensure greater continuity of members on the Working Group. In this connection, the Working Group recalled that at its eleventh session it had "reiterated the concern previously expressed at its tenth session, that greater continuity in its membership was desirable, and expressed the view that adequate representation of developing countries at the Working Group sessions was essential to its work" (see E/CN.3/1987/21, para. 4). Nevertheless, the Working Group considered it necessary to fix a maximum limit on the size of the Working Group. No agreement was reached on what the maximum size should be and the proposals that were made varied between 10 and 12 members. There was agreement that it was not necessarily the case that the Working Group would have to have for any session the maximum number that might be agreed upon. The Working Group agreed to submit the following proposal to the

Statistical Commission, pointing out, at the same time, that some members of the Working Group had suggested a change to some of the criteria contained therein for selection of the Working Group:

"The Working Group consists of the officers of the Commission, that is, the Chairman, the three Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur; the representatives to the Commission of the two major contributors to the budget of the United Nations, unless they are already represented in the Bureau; and representatives to the Commission from other Member States selected so as to ensure representation on the Working Group of both developed and developing countries, countries with different economic and statistical systems and with special attention to ensuring representation of developing countries from among the members of each of the following regional commissions: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic Commission for Africa and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia."

90. The Working Group considered that the final agreement would be reached during the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission and that towards that end the Secretariat would help in organizing advance informal consultations among members of the Statistical Commission.

#### IX. DATES AND PLACE OF THE FOURTEENTH SESSION

91. The Working Group recommended that its fourteenth session be held on dates close to the meeting of the International Statistical Institute, which had already been set for 9-17 September 1991. It had been found in the past that this approach facilitated attendance at the Working Group of the maximum number of members. Consequently, and taking account of scheduled public holidays in Geneva, the Working Group recommended that its fourteenth session be held at Geneva from 19 to 21 September 1991. This recommendation reflected the fact that the International Statistical Institute session will close only on Monday, 17 September 1991 and consequently the earliest that the Working Group could meet would be Wednesday, 19 September 1991, allowing for the members of the Working Group to travel from the site of the International Statistical Institute meeting to Geneva. The Working Group noted that these circumstances resulted in a planned Working Group session of three days rather than the usual four days, which had been found necessary for recent sessions. The Working Group stressed that this arrangement for 1991 should not create a precedent.

#### Notes

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1989, Supplement No. 3 (E/1989/21), para. 229.

2/ Ibid., para. 159 (e).

3/ Ibid., paras. 154-159.

Notes (continued)

4/ Ibid., para. 214.

5/ Ibid., paras. 192 (d) and 203 (d) and (e).

6/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1987, Supplement No. 6 (E/1987/19), para. 198 (a).

7/ Ibid., 1989, Supplement No. 3 (E/1989/21), para. 224.

8/ Ibid., 1987, Supplement No. 6 (E/1987/19), paras. 205 and 206; ibid., 1981, Supplement No. 2 (E/1981/12), para. 235.

9/ Ibid., 1989, Supplement No. 3 (E/1989/21), paras. 162 and 163 (a).

10/ Ibid., para. 214.

11/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 2 (E/5236), paras. 209 and 210.

12/ Ibid., para. 212.

Annex

AGENDA FOR THE THIRTEENTH SESSION

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
3. Revision of the System of National Accounts (SNA).
4. International Comparison Programme (ICP).
5. Provisional agenda and documentation for the twenty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission.
6. General development and integration of methodological work.
7. Co-ordination of the statistical data collection activities of international organizations.
8. Identification of ways to accelerate statistical development while ensuring co-ordination in selected fields of statistics.
9. Composition of the Working Group.
10. Dates and place of the fourteenth session.
11. Report of the Working Group to the Statistical Commission.

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