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Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/220 and past practices, provides a summary of the work of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys. It provides information on the establishment of the governance mechanism and the programme of activities initiated and to be undertaken by the Intersecretariat Working Group to foster the coordination and integration of household survey activities. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the progress of the work carried out by the Intersecretariat Working Group.

* E/CN.3/2017/1.



I. Introduction

1. At its forty-sixth session, in 2015, the Statistical Commission, in its decision 46/105, endorsed the establishment of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys, under the aegis of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, to foster the coordination and harmonization of household survey activities. The Commission also requested the development of the terms of reference of the Intersecretariat Working Group, under the guidance of the Bureau of the Statistical Commission, to be presented to the Commission at its forty-seventh session.

2. In response to that request, the terms of reference of the Intersecretariat Working Group were set out in the report of the Secretary-General presented to the Statistical Commission at its forty-seventh session ([E/CN.3/2016/21](#)). In his report, the Secretary-General described the rationale, objectives and mandate of the Intersecretariat Working Group as well as a governance model adapted from that of the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts and functioning at two levels: the management group and the technical working group. The Intersecretariat Working Group will be supported by an advisory panel that will, in turn, support the work of the technical working group in specific areas, as listed in the report. The Commission took note of the report in its decision 47/116.

3. The present report provides information on the progress made by the Intersecretariat Working Group since its establishment. In addition, it describes the broad contours of work to be undertaken by the Intersecretariat Working Group in the next two years. A detailed programme of work will be submitted to the Statistical Commission as a background document in February 2017.

II. Progress made in rolling out the work of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

4. The Intersecretariat Working Group initiated its work at the first meeting of the management group, which was held in March 2016 with the Statistics Division serving as Chair. The management group, inter alia, discussed in detail the future work that it wished to undertake and modalities for identifying priority areas of work. The Intersecretariat Working Group decided to focus initially on the development of new international statistical standards for household surveys. In order to begin to identify methodological issues with respect to survey methods and other aspects of household surveys, the agencies also agreed to provide to the Secretariat with: (a) information on priority issues/methodologies that need to be developed, both in their specific areas of expertise and in cross-cutting areas/issues; and (b) a proposal for the establishment of related task forces, including the recommended membership of each task force, associated outputs/deliverables, a suggested timeline and expected costs. The management group proposed the inclusion of other major stakeholders as members of the Intersecretariat Working Group. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics and the Demographic and Health Surveys Programme have since joined the Group.

5. At its second meeting, held in September 2016, the management group re-emphasized the need to address common cross-cutting issues through the identification of priority issues and to work on them. The management group also recognized the importance of the work of the individual agencies in developing methodologies and standards with regard to specific thematic areas. The management group acknowledged the need for coordination among the agencies in order to provide more integrated support to countries, bearing in mind their specific needs arising from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The management group advised that the programme of work of the Intersecretariat Working Group be clustered around four pillars: thematic (topics of interest to one or more agencies), methodological (those focusing on the development of statistical methods, standards and guidelines on different aspects of producing statistics from household surveys), integration (cross-cutting issues common to multiple household surveys) and coordination (among the members of the Working Group and other stakeholders). The management group appointed the International Labour Organization both as its Chair and as Chair of the technical working group.

6. The first meeting of the technical working group was held in November 2016 and had as its main objective the development of a programme of work for the next two or three years. The members of the technical working group agreed that while the emphasis should be placed on seeking synergies within the group through coordination and information-sharing, the group would also identify a few priority areas of work, focusing on definitions of standards and concepts and on the sharing of best practices. Following the first meeting of the management group, some of the member agencies had submitted proposals along with terms of reference on the creation of task forces for undertaking normative work related to household surveys on topics of their interest. Some of them had already initiated the work, while others were planning to do so in collaboration with other members of the group. The task forces formed thus far will focus on the following topics:

(a) Measuring food consumption in household surveys (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations);

(b) Standards and best practices for survey data documentation (World Bank);

(c) Promotion of consistent measurement of paid and unpaid working activities (International Labour Organization);

(d) Module on Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicators for inclusion in ongoing household surveys (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime);

(e) Standards for education-spending estimates based on household survey data (UNESCO Institute for Statistics).

7. In the run-up to the meeting of the technical working group, information was obtained on methodological work that the agencies have initiated or are planning to undertake in the near future. The list of proposals as stated will be submitted as a background document to the Statistical Commission in March 2017. A quick review of the proposals received from the agencies clearly showed the inter-agency collaboration at work. The members of the technical group also agreed that this agency-led normative work needs to be systematically recorded and managed through the technical working group, to ensure that there is no duplication of efforts

and that all the agencies benefit from and contribute to the process. The mechanism of quality assurance and endorsement of the methodological work proposed by the agencies is still under discussion and will soon be finalized. The possible involvement of the members of an advisory panel (yet to be established) was also considered in this regard.

8. The members of the technical working group recognized that, as with the Millennium Development Goal indicators, a significantly large number of Sustainable Development Goal global indicators will be sourced from household surveys. Therefore, the members agreed that as a starting point, the group should undertake a mapping exercise of Sustainable Development Goal indicators that can be measured with data taken from existing survey programmes and consequently identify gaps in data and methodologies. Such an exercise could also help members to propose a more integrated approach to household surveys, ensure compatibility among surveys and decide on their frequency. It was agreed that such a mapping activity was a good area of work for the members of the group to undertake together. It was also decided that while the technical working group participates in this exercise, the work of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals and of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be taken into consideration.

9. The technical working group is currently working on an inventory, namely, a list of guidelines and training materials related to household surveys, and it will submit the compiled list as a background document to the Statistical Commission in March 2017.

III. Workplan of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

10. The Intersecretariat Working Group has agreed to work in the areas set out below in the next two to three years.

Mapping of household surveys for the development of an integrated system of household surveys

11. Given the wide-ranging data needs of the global set of Sustainable Development Goal indicators, in addition to the many other existing indicator frameworks, great pressure will be placed on national statistical and household survey systems in the coming years. What is currently lacking among international agencies is a common view on the type of integrated system of household surveys that could meet these needs more efficiently than could be achieved through separate surveys on different topics. The Intersecretariat Working Group will work to develop a common view on a possible integrated household survey system to serve as guidance for agencies and countries in planning the development of their systems. This work will be undertaken in two phases. In the first, the Sustainable Development Goal indicator framework will be used to identify the household surveys that can address the requirements of the data needs of the Sustainable

Development Goal indicators, and more detailed information on those surveys will be gathered and compiled. This will be accomplished through the development of a comprehensive matrix that will show the demand for household surveys arising from the Sustainable Development Goal indicator framework reflecting tier, developments under way and so forth. As much as possible, other indicator frameworks will also be referenced to ensure completeness. Once the above-mentioned stock-taking has been carried out, the discussion in the second phase will turn to the development of a common view on a possible integrated survey system that can be applied at the national level and that will consider issues such as periodicity; appropriate measurement approaches, including survey design; the compatibility of different topics; overlapping areas; the possibility of adopting modular approaches; and the development of a communications strategy through which to relate and advocate the findings.

Development of inventory of guidance and training activities

12. An inventory of training and guidance materials will be prepared on the basis of inputs received from the agencies. This will help the Intersecretariat Working Group to systematically review the available materials for identifying commonalities and synergies, and also identify gaps. With the support of the advisory panel, synergies will be found within the existing programmes of work on the development and communication of guidance and training, and plans will be developed to build on those synergies. A communications strategy will also be developed for the outcomes.

Coordination of and reporting on methodological work of member agencies

13. The methodological work on household surveys initiated or planned by the various agencies will be coordinated by the Intersecretariat Working Group. Initially, this will involve the formation of various task forces among the agencies that have a common interest in the topics identified. The advisory panel that is being established is expected to play a crucial role in providing technical support to the task forces. The activities and outputs of the task forces will be reported to the Statistical Commission at future sessions. A suitable communications strategy will also be developed by the Group.

IV. Conclusions

14. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the progress made thus far by the Intersecretariat Working Group and of its proposed programme of work.