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Items for discussion and decision: Statistical capacity-building

**Third Roundtable on Managing for Development Results
“Better Statistics for Better Results”**

Prepared by the World Bank

Third Roundtable on Managing for Development Results “Better Statistics for Better Results”

1. The Third Roundtable on Managing for Development Results took place in Hanoi, Vietnam, from 5 to 8 February 2007. Under the sponsorship of the government of Vietnam, OECD-DAC, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Development Program, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Representatives of 33 countries attended, including in many cases the heads of national statistical organizations. Improving statistics was one of the five principal themes of the conference.
2. Three years ago at Marrakech the Second Roundtable endorsed a time-bound and costed action plan for improving development statistics. Activities under the Marrakech Action Plans for Statistics (MAPS) have been discussed at subsequent meetings of the UN Statistical Commission. This Third Roundtable meeting was an occasion to review progress on MAPS with multilateral and bilateral donors and representatives of developing countries.
3. Much has been accomplished since 2004. With support from PARIS21, regional bodies, international agencies, and from bilateral donors, 88 countries have undertaken National Statistical Development Strategies to guide the development of their statistical systems. Many are also subscribers to the General Data Dissemination System. Based on these plans, countries and donors have begun to increase their investments in statistics.
4. Work on the next round of population and housing censuses has begun. The UN Statistics Division has initiated an intergovernmental process to increase support for censuses in developing countries.
5. Along with censuses, surveys are a major source of development statistics. In 2005 the International Household Survey Network was formed to coordinate activities and provide tools for documenting and archiving surveys, thus ensuring that the investment in surveys will continue to pay dividends into the future.
6. MAPS called for actions to improve the quality and availability of data needed in the near terms to measure progress on national development plans and the Millennium Development Goals. An Accelerated Data Program, now being piloted in six African countries by the World Bank and PARIS21, is demonstrating that immediate improvements can be obtained from existing data sets.
7. At Marrakech, the international agencies also pledged to improve their governance and performance. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics now provide guidance on their roles and responsibilities.
8. Several country representatives addressed the problem of building effective, sustainable statistical systems. Their advice was as varied as their experience, but there were some common

points of agreement:

- Politicians and policy makers often undervalue statistics, sometimes because they don't trust them, they aren't aware of them, or they don't know how to use them.
- Stimulating the demand for statistics is an important way to improve their supply and quality. Statistical offices need to provide the information their clients need, when they need it, and in a form that they can use.
- A national statistical development strategy is an important tool for building consensus within the country and for coordinating donor assistance.
- For countries to take control of their statistical systems, they have to be willing to use their own resources to support them. But good statistics are costly, and greater donor support is needed.
- Building statistical capacity requires long-term commitment on the part of governments and donors.

9. Throughout the discussions there was a strong sense of optimism. Although many developing countries still face great difficulties in providing the information needed to measure development results, the experience of the last three years provides strong evidence that progress is possible. The participants in the statistics theme summarized their discussions in a report back to the plenary as follows:

- MAPS continues to define important priorities for improving national and international statistical systems.
- Strong statistical systems, based on professional integrity, institutional autonomy, and a commitment to high standards, provide the basis for producing credible statistics needed for informed decision making. Public dissemination is an integral part of the statistical production process.
- Statistics remain underfunded and require greater resources from countries and donors, coordinated through national statistical development strategies. The development of effective statistical systems should be an integral part of all broad-based development programs.
- There remains an urgent need for reliable statistics to guide development programs and monitor progress toward the MDGs. Making better use of existing data, deploying effective survey programs, and completing the next round of censuses should be given a high priority by countries and international agencies.

10. During regional sessions, country and donor representatives also discussed their priority needs to more effectively manage for development results. In their presentations to the plenary, there was a very clear message that many countries want to improve their statistical systems and the use of statistics in the development process, and that they want to integrate planning for their statistical systems in their national development strategies.

11. In summarizing the results of the meeting, representatives of the government of Vietnam, the Asian Development Bank, OECD-DAC, the World Bank, and the government of Ghana all reiterated two core points: reliable statistics are urgently needed to guide the development process and that increased investment is needed to establish sustainable national statistical systems in developing countries. It was a clear priority that these conclusions should be taken forward, to scale-up efforts to improve statistical capacity and relevant statistical outputs. The

representative of the World Bank proposed to present a credible plan to the spring meetings of the Governors of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, with the intention of defining more clearly what is needed and raising the necessary resources.