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ECLAC
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Third meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of
the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Santiago, Chile, 1-3 June 2005

REPORT OF THE RAPPORTEUR

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A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Place and date of meeting

1. The third meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) was convened by the Executive Secretary of ECLAC in accordance with resolution 2000/7 of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and was held in Santiago, Chile, from 1 to 3 June 2005.

Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following members countries of ECLAC: Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, France, Germany, Jamaica, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, United States of America, United Kingdom and Uruguay.
3. On behalf of the United Nations Secretariat, the meeting was attended by a representative of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).
4. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the following United Nations funds and programmes: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).
5. The following specialized agencies of the United Nations were also represented: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Tourism Organization (WTO) and World Bank.
6. In addition, the meeting was attended by representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations: Andean Community, Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Central American Monetary Council, Centre for Latin American Monetary Studies (CEMLA), European Commission, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Inter-American Statistical Institute (IASI), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Latin American Integration Association (LAIA), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT).
7. The Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUM) and the International Comparison Program (ICP) were also represented at the meeting.

Organization of work

8. The work of the Conference was conducted in plenary sessions on in-depth analysis of the following substantive issues: a) “Follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals: challenges and opportunities for national statistical systems”; b) “Development of national statistical systems and responsibilities of national statistical offices”; and c) “Human resources training and education: towards a strategic vision”. These sessions were followed by presentations on a report on the implementation of the Programme of International Statistical Work for Latin America and the Caribbean, July 2003-June 2005, and a proposed programme of international statistical work for Latin America and the Caribbean, July 2005-June 2007.

B. AGENDA

9. At its first plenary session, the Conference adopted the following agenda:
 1. Adoption of the agenda and organization of the work of the third meeting of the Statistical Conference (SCA) of the Americas of ECLAC
 2. Report on the Programme of International Statistical Work for Latin America and the Caribbean, July 2003-June 2005
 3. Presentation of the proposed strategic guidelines for regional statistical development in Latin America and the Caribbean
 - (a) Strategic goals
 - (b) Operational modalities, mechanisms for follow-up and coordination
 4. Discussion of the proposed programme of regional statistical work for Latin America and the Caribbean, July 2005-June 2007
 - (a) Lines of work and activities
 - (b) Inter-agency, subregional and bilateral coordination
 - (c) Formation of working groups
 5. Presentation and discussion of substantive issues
 - (a) Human resources training and education: towards a strategic vision
 - (b) Development of national statistical systems and the responsibilities of national statistical offices
 - (c) Follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals: challenges and opportunities for national statistical systems
 6. Report of the Rapporteur
 7. Adoption of agreements
 8. Election of the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC for the 2005-2007 term.

C. OPENING SESSION

10. At the opening session, statements were made by Mr. José Luis Machinea, Executive Secretary of the ECLAC, and Mr. Máximo Aguilera, President of the Chilean National Institute of Statistics and Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas.
11. The Executive Secretary of ECLAC welcomed all participants and said that the activities carried out in fulfilment of the Statistical Conference's programme of work were the result of the coordinated efforts of the member countries' Governments. The Statistical Conference provided an institutional forum for multilateral cooperation aimed at developing statistics in region. Official statistics not only represent inputs for decision making but also are an important factor for the democratic life of society. Mr. Machinea highlighted the four priority areas of the strategic plan 2005-2015: strengthening statistical systems; training and management of human resources; development of statistical capacity; and intra-regional and international cooperation. The Executive Secretary of the ECLAC also highlighted that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have proved to be an incentive for international cooperation in the statistical field.
12. The Director of the Chilean National Institute of Statistics, speaking in his capacity as Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Conference, reiterated the progress made and raised the necessity to continue to advance in the development of statistics in the region. He highlighted the growing consolidation of the role of the SCA as the driving force behind the development of statistics in the Americas. He also highlighted that the choice of the year 2015 as target date for the strategic vision matches with the target date of the MDGs, in order to take advantage of synergies in the field of international cooperation.
13. The President of the Executive Committee of the SCA submitted the agenda of the meeting (LC/L.2291) to the Conference, which approved it without modifications.
14. In closing, the President of the Executive Committee of the SCA appointed Mr. Antonio Martínez, the delegate of Spain, to serve as Rapporteur of the Conference.

D. PROCEEDINGS

Report on the Programme of International Statistical Work for Latin America and the Caribbean, July 2003-June 2005 (agenda item 2)

15. The Secretariat briefly presented the Multilateral Projects database (BADEPRO), which is available through the SCA Website. This database is the main tool for the dissemination on information on regional cooperation, and collects information on ongoing projects provided by participating institutions and represents a supporting mechanism for the member countries of the SCA. Information includes the definition, activities, topics, implementation period, objectives and results of statistical

projects in the region.

16. Besides the information contained in BADEPRO, the Secretariat presented the “Progress report on the activities of the Programme of International Statistical work for Latin America and the Caribbean, July 2003-June 2005” (LC/L.2113/Rev.2), whose preliminary versions were submitted to the Executive Committee at the meetings held in 2004.
17. This report presents the activities realized in the framework of the work program for the July 2003-June 2005 period, on the basis of four subprogrammes: i) Adaptation and production of basic statistics within the framework of a regional strategy for the implementation of the System of National Accounts 1993 (1993 SNA); ii) Improvement of the production and use of statistics on social variables and well-being; iii) Improvement and expansion of the production of statistics in specific areas; and iv) Modernization of statistical systems and data dissemination.
18. Delegates expressed satisfaction with respect to advancements in the field of cooperation between countries and international agencies, progress in the implementation of 1993 SNA, progress in the tourism satellite account, the International Comparison Program (ICP), work on social statistics, and the integration of new approaches, such as gender statistics, science and technology, information and communications technology, and environmental indicators.

Presentation and discussion of substantive issues (agenda item 5)

19. The SCA, following the recommendations of the fourth meeting of its Executive Committee, held in Dallas on 30 November and 1 December, 2004, examined in detail the following topics:
 - (a) Follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals: challenges and opportunities for national statistical systems;
 - (b) Development of national statistical systems and the responsibilities of national statistical offices;
 - (c) Human resources training and education: towards a strategic vision.
20. The documents on each of the topics, prepared by the Secretariat and member countries, were distributed to all participating delegations and are available on the SCA Website.
 - Follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals: challenges and opportunities for national statistical systems
21. The Secretariat presented the document titled “Follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals: opportunities and challenges for National Statistical Systems” (LC/L.2319), highlighting the following challenges: availability of social and environmental data, inter-institutional cooperation in the framework of national statistical systems, international comparability, relevance of social indicators for national policies, and sustainability of human and financial resources to monitor the MDGs.
22. The Secretariat referred to the following opportunities: promotion of statistical activities, improvement of technical quality and harmonization of regional statistics.
23. On the basis of the challenges and opportunities presented, the Secretariat then recommended to work on the improvement of the following: planning, administration and coordination of national statistical

systems, access and utilization of environmental statistics, and availability of indicators to monitor the MDGs.

24. Delegates commented that the monitoring process of the MDGs must incorporate national statistical offices and be adapted to national conditions. Likewise, indicators should reflect the diversity of living conditions within countries, in particular with respect to gender, ethnicity and geographical areas.
 25. A request was made that official development assistance includes in its programs a component destined to strengthen statistical information.
 26. Delegates also recommended that international agencies in charge of monitoring the MDGs favor updated national data, and insisted in the necessity to incorporate metadata associated with these indicators.
- Development of national statistical systems and the responsibilities of national statistical offices
27. The President of the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information of Mexico presented the document titled “Development of National Statistical Systems and the responsibilities of National Statistical Offices” (LC./L.2318), which—as a result of a questionnaire sent to countries—contains the results of an assessment of the operations of national statistical offices of the region. The assessment is devoted to five main areas: planning and statistical information; legal framework; national statistical system; operations of national statistical offices; and international cooperation.
 28. The delegate of the National Statistical Office of Spain presented a code of best practices of the European statistical system, whose goal is to promote the credibility, quality and application of best practices in statistical matters, such as reliability, impartiality and independence of the producers of statistics.
 29. Delegates were pleased by the presentations made by the Mexican and Spanish delegations and highlighted the necessity to complement surveys with a system of indicators providing a more detailed description of national statistical systems.
 30. Delegates also shared their experiences in terms of legislation, autonomy and inter-institutional cooperation.
- Human resources training and education: towards a strategic vision
31. The delegate of the National Statistical Office of Chile presented the document titled “Survey on statistical education and training in the member states of ECLAC” (LC/L.2317), identifying the priority areas for the training of statisticians in the region: labor and social statistics, national accounts, and service statistics. Furthermore, the strength in terms of training capacity of some of the national statistical offices of the region was mentioned.
 32. The delegate of the National Statistical Office of Spain presented the framework of the Spanish international cooperation and its future challenges in terms of training. The delegate mentioned changes in the cooperation platform and the necessity to identify strategic technical areas, highlighting the importance of cooperation with the Latin American and Caribbean region.

33. Delegates shared their experiences in terms of training of human resources and emphasized the importance of horizontal cooperation.

Presentation of the proposed strategic guidelines for regional statistical development in Latin America and the Caribbean (Agenda item 3)

34. The work of the Executive Committee in the 2003-2005 period was oriented to continue with progress made at the first to meetings of the SCA, in order to give the Conference new impulse and consolidate it as the intergovernmental body coordinating the development of statistics in Latin American and Caribbean countries. With this goal in mind, the Executive Committee pointed out to the necessity to broaden the technical and institutional focus and to adopt a strategic vision which would represent the reference framework for regional statistical work.
35. In this line, the President of the Executive Committee presented the “Strategic Plan 2005-2015” (LC/L.2293). This document includes an assessment of statistical capacity in the region and proposes a preliminary approach to the mission, strategic vision, goals and action plans for the SCA during the period.
36. During the debate delegates agreed on the importance of the strategic plan to guide the efforts of the SCA to the year 2015, and to orient the planning the statistical activities of ECLAC as well as of other multilateral and regional organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Delegates valued positively the efforts made by the Executive Committee to elaborate a first version of the strategic plan. However, they made comments on the scope of the strategic plan, the need to incorporate additional subregional groups—such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Latin American Integration Association (LAIA)—, the coverage of topics, the inclusion of the financing dimension, monitoring of progress, and the route that the plan should follow.
37. Delegates also identified three challenges that should constitute a priority for the strategic plan: the monitoring of the MDGs, the 2010 census round, and the changes to the SNA which are expected for the year 2008.
38. After an exchange of opinions on the necessity to clarify the terms of reference of the working groups, the President of the Executive Committee suggested to hold consultations with countries to elaborate a new version of the proposal of the strategic plan, which would be discussed at the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee of the SCA. A final version would be presented at the fourth meeting of the SCA. Delegates welcomed the suggestion.

Discussion of the proposed programme of regional statistical work for Latin America and the Caribbean, July 2005-June 2007 (Agenda item 4)

39. The Secretariat presented the “Draft programme of regional statistical work for Latin America and the Caribbean, July 2005 - June 2007” (LC/L.2294) and highlighted that document L/L.2113/Rev.2 was available to delegates for their information. The latter describes the statistical activities of the ECLAC work programme approved by member countries in 2004 at the Thirtieth Session Period held in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

40. The form of the current draft work programme of the SCA differs from the programmes presented at previous conferences. In particular, the current draft programme takes into account the necessity to recognize more broadly the activities of member countries and other international agencies.
41. The draft work programme consists of four subprogrammes:
 - (1) Institution-building;
 - (2) Human resources and training;
 - (3) Development of statistical capacity;
 - (4) International coordination and regional harmonization.
42. The Secretariat detailed the objectives of subprogramme 1 and discussed the activities and projects proposed, drawing from the experiences underway in Central America and the Andean Region.
43. At the request of the President of the Executive Committee, the delegate of INEC of Argentina presented the objectives and the activities proposed for subprogramme 2 on human resources and training.
44. The Secretariat presented to the SCA the details of the program of work related to Subprogramme 3 “Development of statistical capacity”, with a particular focus on activities in the field of national accounts, classification and nomenclature, satellite accounts, external sector and balance of payments statistics, International Comparison Programme. The Director of the Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago made a presentation on the 1993 SNA revision process, inviting countries to actively participate in this endeavour.
45. The Secretariat continued the presentation of subprogramme 3 with the following topics: gender, social and poverty indicators, environment, science and technology, information and communications technology, as well as on the 2010 round of population censuses.
46. The delegate of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) presented the project “ Program for the Improvement of Living Conditions”, financed through the IDB regional public goods initiative. This project, which intends to respond to the SCA work programme, aims at improving social statistics in the region through technical workshops, working groups, training, technical assistance and the development of information technology tools.
47. The President of the Executive Committee highlighted three main issues in subprogramme 4, “International coordination and regional harmonization”: the harmonization of national accounts, the topic of classifications, and the monitoring of the MDGs, with a particular focus on coordination among international agencies, national statistical offices and other national institutions.
48. During their presentations, the Secretariat and the President of the Executive Committee proposed that the member countries of the SCA, with the cooperation of regional and multilateral agencies, form working groups responsible for the planning and coordination of the activities needed to achieve the objectives defined for the biennium.
49. Delegations discussed the formation of working groups devoted to activities planned in the subprogrammes. In particular, delegates debated the possibility to create these groups in thematic areas such as: institution-building (diagnostic of the statistical systems of the region and collection of best practices in the field of institutional development), training, census, information and

communications technology, monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals, national accounts, as well as poverty and inequality indicators.

50. During the debate delegates expressed their concern with respect to the connection between the objectives of the strategic plan 2005-2015 and the activities proposed in the 2005-2007 work programme. Attention was raised on the issue of using in a more effective way the SCA as an organ that can feed the formulation of the ECLAC work programme in its statistical dimension. Some delegates raised the need to present a more detailed draft work programme and expressed their disquiet with respect to the coordination and proliferation of working groups, as well as the duplication of activities of other initiatives in the region. In particular, working groups would need to identify the financial and human resources necessary to conduct their activities. Other delegates proposed the inclusion of an additional topic in subprogramme 3, namely the use of new technology for the processing and analysis of statistical data.
51. Several delegates shared their experience in the development of social, gender and information and communications technology statistics. In particular, they highlighted the importance of collaboration between national statistical offices and the relevant ministries in the development of sectoral statistics. Similarly, delegates shared experiences on population censuses, their financing and the dissemination of information.
52. Delegates also mentioned that the region needs to determine a minimum set of indicators in the environmental sector, as well as to deepen the study of inequalities, through the exchange of experiences and taking advantage of synergies. Other delegates offered to share information on training programs run by their respective national statistical offices.
53. The President of the Executive Committee adjourned the session with a brief summary of the debates and presented the proposal for agreements and resolutions that would be submitted to delegates during item 7 of the agenda (Adoption of agreements).