


Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Committee on Statistics

Third session

Bangkok, 12-14 December 2012

Item 5(b) of the provisional agenda*

Coordination of statistical capacity-building activities:
Regional partnership
**Summary of the activities of the Partners for Statistics
 Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2010-2012**
Note by the secretariat
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* E/ESCAP/CST(3)/L.1/Rev.1.

I. Introduction

1. Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific is a regional network of international, regional and subregional organizations and bilateral donors concerned with the improvement of statistics in Asia and the Pacific.¹ The Partnership is co-chaired by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The Statistics Division provides secretariat services for the Partnership.

2. The Partnership has met three times: on 14 December 2010 in Bangkok; on 9 September 2011 in Luxembourg; and on 26 February 2012 in New York. A fourth meeting of the Partnership is scheduled to be held in Bangkok in conjunction with the third session of the Committee on Statistics.

II. Establishment

3. The Statistical Commission at its fortieth session requested the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to establish an informal mechanism for donor coordination for statistical development in the region.²

4. To this end, the secretariat invited development partners with an interest and role in statistics development in the Asia-Pacific region to discuss the formation of a coordination mechanism. At the first meeting of the Partners for Statistic Development in Asia-Pacific, which was held in Bangkok on 14 December 2010, international, regional and subregional organizations and bilateral donors as well as representatives of the Governments of Australia, Japan and the Russian Federation agreed to establish the Partnership with the purpose of improving the combined impact of capacity-building activities through enhanced coordination, synergy and complementarity among partners.³

5. The Partnership agreed to align its work with the decisions and priorities outlined by the Committee on Statistics and to coordinate its work with the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities at the global level. It was further agreed that the Partnership would report on the progress made towards meeting its strategic objectives to the Committee on Statistics.

III. Information-sharing mechanism

6. The Partnership decided to function as a network for sharing information and galvanizing collaboration on existing initiatives, rather than identifying a separate programme. Recognizing that information sharing is a first step towards the improvement of cooperation and collaboration, the partners decided to use the *Partner Report on Support to Statistics* (PRESS)⁴ as its primary information-sharing tool. This decision was based on an assessment of PRESS that was conducted by the Partnership secretariat

¹ See www.unescap.org/stat/partnership/index.asp.

² See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2009, Supplement No. 4* (E/2009/24-E/CN.3/2009/29), chap. 1, sect B, decision 40/112, subpara. (f).

³ See <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/acsub/2011docs-17th/SA-2011-12-ESCAP.pdf>.

⁴ See www.paris21.org/Press.

(ESCAP), with technical support from the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21).⁵

7. The Partnership determined that a PRESS with an Asian and Pacific focus would be useful for facilitating the coordination of efforts pertaining to statistical development in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition to implementing the other recommendations of the Partnership, PARIS21 produced a special report on Asia and the Pacific in December 2011, which included a chapter on training activities.⁶

8. The report indicated that most statistical capacity development support in the Asia-Pacific region was destined for a small number of recipients (10 countries received 89.5 per cent of the total country-specific commitments in the Asia-Pacific region). The data showed that little relationship could be drawn between the volume of support to statistics and the recipient's need for capacity development. The report noted that 64 per cent of the financial support to Asia-Pacific countries for statistical capacity development was provided by the European Union, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and World Bank.

IV. Activities of the Partnership, 2010-2012

9. The work of the Partnership since its establishment is presented below and grouped according to the six strategic objectives that were agreed at its first meeting.

A. Advocacy

10. To develop national statistical capacity, governments must recognize the need to invest in statistics. In this regard, advocating the importance of statistics to line ministries and policymakers is a key element of capacity-building activities. The Partnership has highlighted the importance of advocacy across all areas of its work, and has recognized that the Busan Action Plan for Statistics, which was endorsed at the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, provides an opportunity for increasing the visibility of statistics and monitoring.⁷

B. Strengthening the role of national statistics offices as the leader of national statistical systems

11. The Partnership has agreed that national strategies for the development of statistics are important for strategizing and strengthening the role of national statistics offices (NSOs), and that each member of the Partnership should advocate the important role of these offices as champions of enhanced coordination of the national statistical systems with government officials from their respective counterpart ministries and other networks.

⁵ See www.unescap.org/stat/partnership/PRESS-assessment.pdf.

⁶ *Partner Report on Support to Statistics PRESS 2011 Round - Special Report on Asia-Pacific* (Paris, PARIS21, 2011). Available from www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/PRESS2011-asiareport.pdf.

⁷ *Statistics for Transparency, Accountability and Results: A Busan Action Plan for Statistics*, (Paris, PARIS21, 2011). Available from www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/Busanactionplan_nov2011.pdf.

C. Modernizing national statistical information systems

12. The Partnership has agreed that modernization of statistical information systems is particularly important for increasing end-user access to data. It has recognized the importance of regional cooperation in the area of modernization of information systems.

D. Coordination in the development of core sets of indicators in the areas of social, economic, environmental and population statistics

13. The Committee on Statistics at its second session (E/ESCAP/CST(2)/9) in recommendation 2/1 expressed its full support for the a strategic direction with a goal of ensuring that all countries in the region by 2020 have the capability to provide an agreed basic range of population, economic, social and environment statistics.

14. On that point, the Committee at its second session in decision 2/2 decided to establish a Technical Advisory Group on social statistics⁸ to provide recommendations on the strategic directions as well as substantive and methodological guidelines regarding the achievement of the goal to ensure that that all countries in the region by 2020 have the capability to provide an agreed basic range of social statistics. In addition, the Committee at its second session in decision 2/6 endorsed the proposed regional programme for the improvement of economic statistics (E/ESCAP/CST(2)/5), as a formal strategy for the improvement of economic statistics in the region. In the decision, the Committee endorsed the proposal for the transformation of the Technical Advisory Group for the Development of Economic Statistics into a steering group, entitled the “Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics”, to direct the development of the implementation plan for the regional programme.⁹ In addition, the Committee at its second session in decision 2/7 strongly endorsed the proposal of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to develop, over the next six months, a regional implementation plan for the Global Strategy to Improve Agriculture and Rural Statistics. The Committee agreed that the regional implementation plan to improve agricultural and rural statistics should be integrated into the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics. In that light, the Committee decided to establish a subgroup on agricultural statistics under the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for Improvement of Economic Statistics.¹⁰

15. The Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics, which is comprised of experts from member States as well as experts from the Partnership — ADB, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Eurostat, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO RAP), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) — will present the implementation plan for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific for the Committee’s endorsement to the Committee at its third session (E/ESCAP/CST/(3)/4). At the third

⁸ See www.unescap.org/stat/social-stat/TAG-SS.asp.

⁹ See www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/ess/documents/meetings_and_workshops/ICAS5/Ag_Statistics_Strategy_Final.pdf. Available from www.unescap.org/stat/econ/steering-group-econ-stat.asp.

¹⁰ See <http://www.unescap.org/stat/agri-stat/steering-group.asp>.

meeting of the Partnership, which was held on 26 February 2012 in New York, it was noted that there was a lack of committed resources for the Regional Programme and discussed how the importance of strengthening economic statistics could be conveyed convincingly to an audience with the power to make policy decisions. The partners suggested that the Busan Action Plan for Statistics,⁷ which focuses on national strategies for the development of statistics (NSDSs) and closing statistical gaps for policymaking, could possibly be leveraged for this purpose, especially given that donors increasingly refer to NSDSs when they assess country priorities for national statistical systems. The Partnership welcomed the commitment of ILO, World Bank and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization to contribute to the finalization and implementation of the regional implementation plan for economic statistics.

16. The Steering Group for Agricultural Statistics consists of experts from member States and the following partners: ADB; Department for International Development; International Fund for Agricultural Development; FAO RAP; Indian Agricultural Statistics Research Institute, and SPC. A regional action plan for the global strategy will be put forward for the Committee's endorsement at its third session (E/ESCAP/CST(3)/8). The implementing partners — ADB, FAO RAP and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) — are responsible for developing the three components of the regional action plan: research, training, and technical assistance. The partners, at the third meeting of the Partnership, noted the importance of coordinating the training component of the regional action plan with relevant regional initiatives, such as the Working Group on the Coordination of Statistical Training.

17. The Technical Advisory Group on Social Statistics is comprised of experts from member States as well as ADB, ILO, SPC, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The Partnership highlighted that the formation and work of the Technical Advisory Group on Social Statistics presents an opportunity for advocating the coordinating role of the NSOs.

18. A regional programme is being developed in collaboration with countries and partners to improve gender statistics in the Asia-Pacific region. A working group on gender Statistics, under the Regional Coordination Mechanism's Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, has been established to promote inter-agency collaboration on gender statistics. Partners currently represented on the working group are ESCAP, FAO, ILO, the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Development Programme, UNFPA, and the United Nations Children's Fund.

E. Promoting the improvement and use of administrative data

19. A number of partners have been involved in the efforts of national and international players to improve civil registration systems and the vital statistics produced on the basis of registration. The High-level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific will be held in Bangkok alongside the third session of the Committee on Statistics. The Meeting is a collaborative effort of many partners as well as

member States, with some of them serving on the organizing committee. The Partnership has stressed the importance of vital statistics, which was earlier identified in the Busan Action Plan for Statistics as one of the four major statistical gaps.⁷

F. Coordination of statistical training

20. Recognizing the important role that statistical training plays in developing national statistical capacity, the Partnership is committed to coordination aimed at improving the provision of statistical training. In response to the call by Mr. T.C.A. Anant, Member of the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics and Chair of the ESCAP Working Group on the Coordination of Statistical Training, the Partnership is collaborating with the Working Group to facilitate the coordination of training at the national and regional levels. This engagement involves sharing information on training activities and actively providing feedback on the activities of the Working Group.

V. Coordinated approach to supporting countries

21. The partners are working in close coordination to build the capacity of the statistical systems of NSOs in Asia and the Pacific. A concrete example of this is the effort by the Partnership to build a comprehensive, capacity-building strategy for the Myanmar statistical system. In July 2012, development partners — ADB, ESCAP, the European Union, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), UNFPA, and the United Nations Country Team Millennium Development Goals Monitoring and Evaluation group — conducted a preliminary consultation with representatives of several ministries in Myanmar to initiate discussion on identifying and prioritizing statistical capacity-building needs. On the basis of the consultation, the partners worked collectively to develop a proposal for a process to formulate the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics in Myanmar and to compile a preliminary list of previously identified short-term capacity-building needs, indicating what support partners could provide at the various stages. These proposals have been shared with the Government of Myanmar for consideration and for guidance on how the development partners could assist the Government in taking this forward. The following partners have expressed an interest in supporting this work: ADB; ASEAN; ESCAP; the European Union; Eurostat; the Myanmar United Nations Country Team Millennium Development Goals Monitoring and Evaluation group; FAO; PARIS21; SIDA; Statistics Sweden; UNFPA; and the World Bank. This country focused coordinated approach, if successful, could be replicated in other countries with similar special needs for the development of the statistical system.

VI. Areas of work for future collaboration

22. The outcome of United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)¹¹ has created an urgent need to improve statistical capacity in order to produce environment statistics, integrate environment statistics with information on the other development pillars, and, ultimately, produce internationally comparable indicators of sustainable development. The Rio+20 Conference recognized the need for broader measures of progress to complement gross domestic product (GDP) and requested the

¹¹ See General Assembly resolution 66/288 of 27 July 2012.

Statistical Commission in consultation with relevant United Nation system entities and other relevant organizations to launch a programme of work in this area building on existing initiatives.

23. In addition to discussing its strategic areas of collaboration, the Partnership at its fourth meeting, on 12 December 2012, will discuss the scope of collaboration and potential role of partners in following up on the outcome of the Rio+20 Conference. It will review the role partners can play in improving the statistical capacity of countries to produce environment statistics to measure sustainable development, and how to support country engagement in consultations on defining broader measures of progress and well-being in the post-2015 development framework.

VII. Conclusions

24. The Committee may wish to discuss the work of the Partnership, provide guidance on the ongoing and future work of the Partnership, provide input on the approach taken by partners to support countries with special needs regarding statistical capacity-building and, in particular, provide guidance on how the Partnership can continue to support the achievement of the goals of the Committee effectively.
