

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**
Committee on Statistics**Third session**

Bangkok, 12-14 December 2012

Item 7(a) of the provisional agenda*

Reports brought to the attention of the Committee: Bureau**Report on the activities of the Bureau since the second session of the Committee***Summary*

The present report provides an overview of the work carried out by the Bureau since the second session of the Committee. The Committee may wish to take note of the decisions and recommendations of the report.

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* E/ESCAP/CST(3)/L.1/Rev.1.

I. Introduction

1. The Committee on Statistics at its second session, in December 2010,¹ elected the Bureau to perform its functions over the intersessional period until the third session of the Committee. The elected members of the Bureau were: Mr. Brian Pink of Australia (Chair); Mr. Jiantang Ma of China; Mr. T.C.A. Anant of India and Mr. Gerelt-Od Ganbaatar of Mongolia (Vice-chairs); Mr. Sefuiva Reupena Muagututia of Samoa; and Mr. Romulo A. Virola of the Philippines (Rapporteur).

II. Method of work

2. The Bureau met twice during its tenure. The first meeting was held back-to-back with the forty-second session of the Statistical Commission in New York on 20 February 2011. The following members of the Bureau attended the meeting: Mr. Brian Pink (Chair); Mr. Ma Jiantang; Mr. T.C.A. Anant; Mr. Gerelt-Od Ganbaatar; Mr. Sefuiva Reupena Muagututia; Ms. Haishan Fu; and Ms. Davaasuren Chultenjants. Mr. Jan Smit of the secretariat assisted the Bureau at the meeting. The focus of the meeting agenda was the Bureau programme of work and follow-up to the decisions and recommendations of the second Committee session. That included the review of the terms of reference of the working and steering groups and the preparation of resolutions to be submitted to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) at its sixty-seventh session. The Bureau was also briefed on the upcoming interim meeting of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) and the activities of the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific.

3. The second meeting of the Bureau was held back-to-back with the forty-third session of the Statistical Commission in New York on 26 February 2012. The following members of the Bureau attended the meeting: Mr. Brian Pink (Chair); Mr. Feng Nailin (representing Mr. Ma Jiantang); Mr. T.C.A. Anant; and Mr. Sefuiva Reupena Muagututia. Mr. Ata'ata M. Finau of Tonga attended as an observer. Ms. Haishan Fu, Ms. Margarita Guerrero and Ms. Rikke Hansen of the secretariat assisted the Bureau at the meeting. The focus of the meeting's agenda included the progress of the work of the various steering and working groups in implementation of the 2020 strategy of the Committee, and the preparations for the third Committee session.

4. In addition to these two meetings, the Bureau discussed its work programme and provided guidance on the work of the secretariat through teleconferencing and electronic mail.

III. Follow-up on the decisions and recommendations of the Committee at its second session

A. ESCAP resolutions

5. In accordance with decision 2/10 of the Committee on consideration of possible draft resolutions for submission to the Commission at its sixty-seventh session, the Bureau at its first meeting discussed the preparation and submission of three draft resolutions on: (a) the core set of economic statistics; (b) overall statistical capacity development; and (c) vital statistics.

¹ E/ESCAP/CST(2)/9.

6. The Bureau took note of the draft resolution on the core set of economic statistics that had been circulated by the secretariat on behalf of New Zealand prior to the meeting. It expressed its appreciation to New Zealand for drafting a resolution to further support and develop the work of the Committee.

7. The Bureau was informed that the national statistical office of Mongolia was in the process of preparing a draft resolution on statistical capacity development in consultation with its mission in Bangkok, and that prospective co-sponsors were Bhutan and Maldives. To facilitate the process, the secretariat stated that it would share an early draft of its report on the implementation of Commission resolution 62/10 of 12 April 2006 on strengthening statistical capacity in Asia and the Pacific.

8. The secretariat briefed the Bureau on exchanges that had taken place with the Russian Federation regarding the outcome statement of the Regional Forum on the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration in Asia-Pacific, held in Bangkok in June 2010. Although the Russian Federation had provided some comments on the outcome statement, it also recognized that the outcome statement reflected the position of Forum participants and should therefore not be retroactively amended. The Bureau expressed the view that the statement could form a good basis for a proposed resolution on vital statistics and noted that the Russian Federation would have the opportunity to comment on it during the negotiation process. The Bureau decided that it would relay that opinion to the Government of the Philippines, which was planning to sponsor the draft resolution.

9. The Bureau agreed that a Bureau-facilitated consultation with member States on the text of the draft resolutions would be important, but given the timeline of the informal working group on draft resolutions, the consultation could proceed in parallel with the working group process. It requested that all draft resolutions be shared with the Bureau for review by early March 2011, which would allow the Bureau the time needed to initiate a country-consultation process parallel with the informal working group.

10. The Commission at its sixty-seventh session adopted three resolutions regarding statistics development: resolution 67/10 of 25 May 2011 on a core set of economic statistics to guide the improvement of basic economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific; resolution 67/11 of 25 May 2011 on strengthening statistical capacity in Asia and the Pacific; and resolution 67/12 of 25 May 2011 on improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific.²

B. Social statistics

11. In accordance with Committee recommendation 2/1 and decision 2/2 on the strategic direction of the Committee on Statistics, the Bureau, at its first meeting, endorsed the terms of reference for the Technical Advisory Group on social statistics with the provision that they should allow non-members to participate in specific tasks undertaken by the Technical Advisory Group and relevant observers to attend meetings of the Technical Advisory Group. The Bureau also acknowledged the possibility of forming subgroups on thematic issues as deemed necessary by the Technical Advisory Group. The secretariat briefed the Bureau on its ongoing work on the

² See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2011, Supplement No. 19 (E/2011/39-E/ESCAP/67/23)*.

development of a regional framework and capacity-building programme for gender statistics and the likelihood that funding from the Development Account might be available for this work. The Bureau recognized the possibility of assigning the Technical Advisory Group the tasks of overseeing the work on gender statistics.

12. The secretariat sought advice from the Bureau at its second meeting on the continued work of the Technical Advisory Group, particularly regarding the retirement of the Technical Advisory Group's co-chairs and the intrinsic complexity of the issues at hand. The Bureau shared the concerns indicated by the secretariat and expressed the view that the proposed Technical Advisory Group work plan was too ambitious. Following exchanges on the direction and focus of the work of the Technical Advisory Group, it was suggested that the Technical Advisory Group, as a first step, should review national practices for producing social statistics, including the role of national statistical offices and other institutions of national statistical systems, in producing social statistics. Such a review could possibly be structured with the help of a defined list of social statistics domains.

13. The Bureau reviewed the composition and leadership of the Technical Advisory Group and welcomed China as a new member. It decided that the Chair of the Bureau would consult Indonesia on the selection of a new co-chair to replace the current co-chair, who represented Indonesia. In case Indonesia was unable to put forward a replacement candidate, the representative of China offered to consult the National Bureau of Statistics of China on options for identifying a candidate from China. Regarding the second co-chair, Australia expressed an interest in identifying a replacement co-chair from within the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The new leadership of the Technical Advisory Group should be constituted in early March 2012. The Bureau requested the secretariat to organize a teleconference in mid-March between the Bureau and the new co-chairs to discuss and make a final decision on the new direction of the work of the Technical Advisory Group, including a list of what could be realistically achieved before the third Committee session, in December 2012.

14. In May 2012, the Bureau endorsed a proposal by the co-chairs of the Technical Advisory Group that its work should also include population statistics.

C. Civil registration and vital statistics

15. In accordance with Committee decisions 2/3 and 2/4 on vital statistics, the Bureau at its first meeting discussed the work on improving civil registration and vital statistics. The secretariat informed the Bureau of a training workshop for selected countries for conducting national assessments which had been scheduled to take place in Bangkok from 28 to 31 March 2011, and of a back-to-back meeting of relevant development partners which had been scheduled to take place on 31 March 2011 to discuss further collaboration and cooperation in the development of the full regional programme on improving civil registration and vital statistics.

16. At its second meeting, the Bureau expressed satisfaction with the secretariat's preparation for the high-level meeting on civil registration and vital statistics, which was scheduled to be held in Bangkok on 10 and 11 December 2012, immediately prior to the third session of the Committee on Statistics. The Bureau requested the secretariat to share the draft agenda for the high-level meeting for its review. The Bureau further requested the

secretariat to circulate the current draft regional programme on civil registration and vital statistics to all Committee members for consultation to enable the Committee to consider the programme at its third session.

D. Economic statistics

17. In accordance with Committee recommendation 2/2 and decision 2/5 on a core set of economic statistics and Committee decision 2/6 on a regional programme for the improvement of economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the Bureau at its first meeting endorsed the terms of reference of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics, with the following provisions: they allow non-members to participate in specific tasks undertaken by the group; they allow relevant observers to attend meetings of the group; and they allow the secretariat to make some semantic changes to the terms of reference.

18. At its second meeting, the Bureau expressed satisfaction with the progress made by the Steering Group and expressed hope that the implementation plan for the programme on economic statistics would be considered at the third session of the Committee. The Bureau emphasized the importance of incorporating economic statistics training needs in the implementation plan and of linking the training elements to the work of the Working Group on the Regional Coordination of Statistical Training. It also informed the secretariat that it was looking into developing a “core set” of economic statistics at the global level, which could potentially add prominence to the ESCAP core set.

19. The Bureau agreed to a proposal made by the secretariat to retain a consultant to fully develop the implementation plan, provided an appropriate expert could be identified on the basis of the specific terms of reference. The secretariat would consult the Bureau on the selection of the consultant.

E. Agricultural statistics

20. In accordance with Committee decision 2/7 on the integration of agricultural statistics into national statistical systems, the Bureau at its first meeting took note of the terms of reference for the subgroup on agricultural statistics under the Steering Group for the regional programme on economic statistics. The Bureau expressed concern over the proposed six-month time frame for preparing a regional implementation plan for the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics and the lack of clarity on the respective roles of the secretariat and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in the process to develop the regional plan. The Bureau decided that further discussion with FAO was needed before any terms of reference for the subgroup could be endorsed.

21. At a subsequent meeting held on 24 February 2011, which was attended by the Chair of the Committee on Statistics, representatives of the Statistics Division of FAO, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the ESCAP secretariat, it was agreed that: (a) to effectively develop and implement the regional plan, a strong partnership among ESCAP, ADB and FAO was necessary; (b) the terms of reference of the subgroup on agricultural statistics would be revised and reviewed by the Bureau; (c) FAO would inform the Chair of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics of the decision of the Committee on Statistics and an invitation to member States for nomination would be issued jointly by the Chairs of the two bodies; and (d) FAO would provide the necessary funding for the work

to be carried out by ESCAP in developing the regional implementation plan. With regard to the first suggestion, to secure the commitment of ADB, a letter from the Chair of the Committee would be sent to the President of the Bank.

22. At its second meeting, the Bureau expressed satisfaction with the progress made by the Steering Group for Agricultural and Rural Statistics, and emphasized the need to link its work with the agenda on food security in order to engage development partners and obtain coordinated policy support for the regional implementation plan. The Bureau agreed to the workplan of the Steering Group for Agricultural and Rural Statistics, which would focus on developing the regional implementation plan for consideration by the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics in October 2012 and by the Committee on Statistics in December 2012. The Bureau recognized that the regional implementation plan to be developed should take into account the existing plans in the Pacific subregion.

F. Coordination of statistical training in the region

23. In accordance with Committee decision 2/8 on the coordination of statistical training, the Bureau at its first meeting took note of the terms of reference for the working group on the coordination of statistical training in the Asia-Pacific region. It agreed that the main objective of the working group was to propose a strategy for consideration by the Committee, and that the group should be limited, at that stage, to a small number of relevant member States that provide statistical training for other countries in the region. The Bureau endorsed, in general, the draft terms of reference with the provision that non-members would be allowed to participate in specific tasks undertaken by the group and that relevant observers would be allowed to attend meetings of the group. The Bureau appointed Mr. T.C.A. Anant as Chair of the working group and agreed that the Chair would invite nomination of representatives of the following countries: China; India; Indonesia; Japan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; and Samoa on behalf of the Pacific subregion.

24. At the second meeting of the Bureau, Mr. Anant, in his capacity as Chair of the Working Group on Regional Coordination of Statistical Training, presented an overview of the progress of the Group's work. He requested the Bureau to provide comments on a draft strategy paper for the coordination of statistical training in the Asia-Pacific region. The Bureau was informed that the assessment of existing gaps in statistical training was being delayed in order to obtain more responses to a questionnaire covering the topic. The Bureau agreed to an extension of the deadline for the finalization of the strategy, which would be put forward for review and endorsement by the Committee at its third session. The Bureau noted the importance of engaging development partners in efforts to improve coordination of training and expressed satisfaction that the topic was on the agenda for the forthcoming third meeting of the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific, and that Mr. Anant would participate in the meeting. The Bureau suggested that the Committee on Statistics establish either a subcommittee or expert group to coordinate statistical training in the region in the long term. The Bureau requested the secretariat to consider the possibility of organizing a consultative meeting of national and regional training institutes to review the draft strategy.

G. Creating a more adaptive and cost-effective information management environment for national statistical offices through stronger collaboration

25. In accordance with Committee recommendation 2/1 on the strategic direction of the Committee on Statistics, the Bureau at its second meeting discussed the work on the modernization of statistical systems. In view of the recommendations from the tenth management seminar organized by the Statistical Institute for Asia and Pacific (SIAP), it considered options for influencing the work on modernization of statistical information systems, which at the international level was coordinated by the High-Level Group for Strategic Developments in Business Architecture in Statistics (HLG-BAS). The Chair of the Bureau, who was also a member of the HLG-BAS, informed the meeting of the ongoing efforts to develop the Generic Statistical Information Model (GSIM). Two workshops pertaining to GSIM were scheduled to be held in Ljubljana from 20 February to 2 March 2012, and in Daejeon, Republic of Korea, from 16 to 27 April 2012. Considering that the development of GSIM would likely result in new infrastructure standards, the Bureau was of the view that it was important for the Asia-Pacific region to participate in the development process in order to influence the outcome.

26. To support participation from the region in the workshop in the Republic of Korea, the Bureau would provide information on the status and plans for the work on GSIM, including the outcome of the first workshop and the invitation to the second workshop. The note would be circulated by the secretariat to Committee members for consideration and comments. On the basis of the comments received and the outcome of the second workshop, the Chair of the Bureau offered to represent the Committee on Statistics and provide inputs on behalf of the Asia-Pacific region at the next meeting of HLG-BAS. The Bureau agreed to prepare a short paper on the status of the international efforts for review by the Committee at its third session.

H. Monitoring progress towards achieving the 2020 goals of the Committee

27. The Bureau at its second meeting considered options for monitoring progress towards achieving the two strategic goals for 2020 which the Committee had established at its second session in 2010. The Bureau advised that all groups established by the Committee should define expected outcomes of their work and monitor progress towards achieving those goals, while the Committee would take overall stock of progress. The Bureau cautioned that any framework for monitoring the progress should be kept simple and strategic. The Chair of the Bureau offered to work with the secretariat to develop a proposal for consideration by the Committee at its third session.

IV. Preparations for the third session of the Committee

28. At its second meeting, the Bureau agreed to hold the third session of the Committee in Bangkok from 12 to 14 December 2012.

29. The Bureau at the second meeting reviewed a draft agenda prepared by the secretariat and provided advice on the draft. It was of the view that rapid changes in official statistics required more frequent deliberations than the current biennial sessions of the Committee allowed in order for the Committee to carry out its mandate and responsibilities in a timely manner. The proposed agenda item should be reformulated as “Strategic direction and

functioning of the Committee on Statistics” to include a discussion of that issue. The issue could be raised by member States during the sixty-eighth session of the Commission, which would be held in Bangkok from 17 to 23 May 2012, to ensure that it would be considered in the context of the planned review of the conference structure of the Commission, which would be conducted at the sixty-ninth session of the Commission.

30. The Bureau requested that the secretariat invite relevant subregional intergovernmental forums to submit papers on progress in the respective subregions towards achieving the goals of the Committee. The Bureau invited the Partnership on Measuring Information and Communications Technology for Development, of which the secretariat was a member, to organize a side event on information and communications technology (ICT) indicators at the third session of the Committee, rather than considering that issue as an information agenda item.

31. The Bureau requested the secretariat to circulate the draft agenda to all members of the Committee for review prior to its finalization.

V. Other work

A. Informing the Statistical Commission

32. At its first meeting, the Bureau agreed that the secretariat should, on behalf of the Committee, inform the Statistical Commission of the key decisions made by the Committee on the regional programmes for vital statistics and economic statistics under appropriate agenda items of the Commission session. At its second meeting, the Bureau welcomed the offer by the Chief of the Statistics Division to apprise the Statistical Commission at its forty-third session, during the discussion under the relevant agenda items, of developments in the Asia-Pacific region.

B. Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific

33. At its first meeting, the Bureau was briefed on the forthcoming interim meeting of the Governing Council of SIAP, which was scheduled to be held in New York on 23 February 2011. Among the items on the interim meeting’s agenda were the Institute’s financial situation, an expert opinion paper on an evaluation of the Institute conducted from 2009-2010,³ and recent activities of the Institute. The Bureau stressed that the interim meeting was an important opportunity for the Governing Council to provide real guidance on the Institute’s financial status. In that regard, the need for a viable business plan and a vision for the future strategic direction of the Institute were emphasized.

³ E/ESCAP/66/19/Add.1.