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Strategic direction and functioning of the Committee on Statistics: Monitoring framework for the work of the Committee

A proposed approach to monitoring the work of the Committee on Statistics**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present document describes a proposed approach to monitoring the work of the Committee on Statistics. It has been prepared by the secretariat at the request of the Bureau of the Committee and under the guidance of its Chair.

Highlighting the purpose of monitoring, which arises from the strategic goals of the Committee regarding statistics development in Asia and the Pacific, the secretariat outlines the key principles guiding the proposed monitoring approach and the governance and reporting arrangements for ensuring that it is applied effectively.

The Committee may wish to review and consider the proposed monitoring approach for endorsement, and provide guidance on its implementation.

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I. Introduction

1. At its meeting in New York in February 2012, the Bureau considered options for monitoring progress towards achieving the 2020 strategic goals of the Committee and requested the secretariat to work with the Chair of the Committee to develop a proposal for consideration by the Committee at its third session.¹

2. The present document has been prepared in response to the request by the Bureau. It starts by outlining the purpose of monitoring, which arises from the need to assess progress towards achieving the strategic goals set by the Committee for statistics development in Asia and the Pacific. It then outlines the key monitoring principles together with reporting and governance arrangements for ensuring effective monitoring.

II. The need for monitoring progress towards achieving shared goals

3. Why is monitoring necessary for the Committee on Statistics? What purposes does monitoring serve? Answers to these questions lie in an overview of the mandates of the Committee, its strategic goals and the efforts required by all partners to achieve the goals.

A. Strategic goals and work programme of the Committee

4. The Committee is the highest-level intergovernmental body concerned with statistics in Asia and the Pacific. As a subsidiary body of the Commission, the Committee is mandated to address issues related to: (a) tracking key socioeconomic and environmental trends in the ESCAP region, especially progress towards the Millennium Development Goals; (b) identifying data requirements in the region for economic, social and environmental analysis in accordance with internationally agreed standards

¹ See the report of the Bureau on its activities since the second session of the Committee (E/ESCAP/CST(3)/14).

and good practices; and (c) capacity-building for national statistical offices in the ESCAP region to produce, disseminate and analyse data in accordance with internationally agreed standards and good practices.²

5. The Committee meets biennially to discuss issues of common concern among national statistical systems in Asia and the Pacific, and to develop strategies and make decisions on how countries could work together to achieve results. In particular, the Committee seeks to be proactive in determining which statistical capacity developments are needed the most, where the Committee can have the greatest impact, and how regional cooperation related to statistical development should be carried out.

6. At its second session, in December 2010, the Committee endorsed a longer-term direction to support national statistical capacity development across the region, guided by two overarching strategic goals: (a) ensuring that all countries in the region by 2020 have the capability to provide an agreed basic range of population, economic, social and environmental statistics; and (b) creating a more adaptive and cost-effective information management environment for national statistical offices through stronger collaboration.³

7. The Committee aims to achieve its strategic goals by supporting the development and implementation of relevant global initiatives and by pursuing a range of targeted regional programmes. At its second session, the Committee made decisions and recommendations to develop: (a) a regional action plan for the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics; (b) a regional implementation plan for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics; (c) a regional programme to improve civil registration and vital statistics; and (d) a strategy to support capacity development to improve social statistics.⁴ Recognizing the critical role of statistical training, the Committee also decided to develop a strategy to strengthen coordination of statistical training in the region.⁵

8. To guide its work in these areas, the Committee decided to establish a number of steering, technical advisory and working groups composed of national and international statistical experts. The Committee also encouraged development partners to further strengthen coordination and improve synergy of statistical activities in the region.⁶

B. Country commitment and support of development partners

9. The strategic goals of the Committee are supported at the highest level by the Commission, which, through three resolutions at its sixty-

² See Commission resolution 64/1 on the restructuring of the conference structure of the Commission, annex II.

³ See E/ESCAP/CST(2)/9, chap. I, sect. A, recommendation 2/1.

⁴ See *ibid.*, chap. I.

⁵ See *ibid.*, chap. I, decision 2/8.

⁶ For information on the progress of the work of these groups, see the following documents: (a) report of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics (E/ESCAP/CST(3)/4); (b) strategic approach and plan of work of the Technical Advisory Group on Social Statistics (E/ESCAP/CST(3)/5); (c) civil registration and vital statistics: Make every life count (E/ESCAP/CST(3)/6); (d) report of the Steering Group for Agricultural Statistics (E/ESCAP/CST(3)/8); and (e) report of the Working Group on Coordination of Statistical Training (E/ESCAP/CST(3)/12).

seventh session (67/10, 67/11 and 67/12), called upon members and associate members to prioritize the strengthening of their national statistical systems and align resources and institutional arrangements to support the achievement of the goals of the Committee.

10. The goals of the Committee are also supported by the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific (the Partnership). The Partnership at its inaugural meeting, in December 2010, agreed to use the strategic goals and priorities of the Committee to form the basis for statistical capacity development activities of development partners in the region.⁷ Experts from the members of the Partnership serve on various steering or technical advisory groups relevant to their respective areas of work.⁸

11. While the strategic goals of the Committee define the overall direction of its work programme until 2020, the specific areas that the Committee will pursue through recommendations and decisions will further evolve over time. For example, at its current session, the Committee will review the recent development of international frameworks and standards regarding environmental statistics, and decide on steps to be taken to support the improvement of environmental statistics among countries in Asia and the Pacific. The Committee will also reflect on the implications of the emerging post-2015 global development agenda and its monitoring framework for national statistics systems, and make relevant recommendations for regional action.

C. Purpose of monitoring

12. Proper monitoring and reporting will allow the Committee to make periodic, necessary adjustments and thus help ensure progress towards the Committee's goals. It will enable national Governments, development partners and donors to see measurable results in the key areas of the Committee's work for which they have specific responsibilities and accountability.

13. The need to monitor progress in statistics development in the region has long been recognized by the Committee. When the Committee reviewed regional statistics development at its first session, in 2009, some member States noted the importance of tracking progress in the region and requested that the secretariat, in cooperation with regional, subregional and national statistical entities, formulate a methodology and prepare regional assessments on a regular basis.⁹ The Committee agreed that such assessments would contribute to the exchange of statistical information and experiences and promote the role of statistics as key to economic and social development in the region. With the establishment of a set of strategic goals, it is imperative for the Committee to include effective results-based monitoring and reporting.

III. Key principles

14. To ensure that monitoring serves its purposes as mentioned above, a set of key principles are proposed.

⁷ See E/ESCAP/CST(3)/13.

⁸ For details, see references listed in footnote 6.

⁹ See E/ESCAP/CST/10, chap. I. See also *ibid.*, para. 25.

A. Principle 1
Monitoring should be light and strategic

15. Monitoring should be light so as not to introduce unnecessary burden on the relevant parties. To the extent possible, currently available information will be used for monitoring. At the same time, efforts will be made to capitalize on existing technology to reduce the burden on countries and other partners. Monitoring should be strategic in that the focus will be put on providing information that is critical for the Committee and partners to decide and take actions regarding the achievement of the longer-term goals.

16. In order to be “light and strategic”, the monitoring of progress in the implementation of the Committee’s work could be done through regular, already mandated progress reports on the various aspects of the Committee’s initiatives. It is important that such progress reports cover actions by all key stakeholders, including the national statistical systems, the secretariat and other development partners.

B. Principle 2
Monitoring both activities and results

17. The general strategy for monitoring progress of work of the Committee should cover: (a) monitoring the implementation of the work of the Committee, including the agreed action and planned activities on the part of member States, the secretariat and other development partners, as described in the respective regional initiatives;¹⁰ and (b) monitoring the results of the work, including improvements in national statistical capacity as described in the respective regional initiatives.

18. The regional initiatives are unlikely to yield the desired results unless all partners make concerted efforts. Thus, it is important for the monitoring to cover the agreed activities of all partners. For example, if the Committee recommends that all countries in the Asia-Pacific region conduct a rapid assessment of their respective civil registration and vital statistics system, a target date should be specified and monitoring carried out and reviewed accordingly. Similarly, if relevant development partners commit themselves to providing countries with support in the process of conducting such assessments, then their contributions — technical or otherwise — need to be monitored against the agreed plans. Meanwhile, the secretariat, in servicing the Committee, should report on how it has facilitated engagement by member States and development partners in the process.

19. To monitor the results of the Committee’s work, the proposed approach to monitoring focuses on changes in the capacity of national statistical systems to provide an agreed basic range of population, social, economic and environmental statistics. This effort is further guided by the principles described below.

¹⁰ The Regional Action Plan to improve agricultural and rural statistics, for example, requires coordinated efforts of the statistical office and ministries responsible for agriculture, land use, forestry and fishery at the national level. It also spells out the actions of multiple regional and global partners to support national efforts. See E/ESCAP/CST(3)/8 (the full text of the Regional Action Plan is available in English only as a conference room paper (E/ESCAP/CST(3)/CRP.2)).

C. Principle 3
Monitoring progress and improvement in specific areas of work

20. At its meeting in February 2012, the Bureau advised that, while the Committee should take stock of overall progress periodically, each steering, technical advisory or working group established by it should define the expected outcomes of their work and monitor progress accordingly.

21. Following this principle, each of the regional statistics development initiatives pursued by the Committee should include, within the general monitoring approach of the Committee, a built-in monitoring and reporting framework.

22. Given their importance in guiding capacity development in the respective area of regional initiatives pursued by the Committee, the core sets of statistics should play a central role in monitoring the achievement of the Committee's goals. Where a core set of statistics is adopted (such as in the case of the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics), one approach could be to monitor and evaluate periodically the availability and quality (such as whether relevant international standards and quality assurance frameworks have been applied) of the relevant core set of basic statistics. The monitoring information can be used as a proxy for changes in the underlying capacity.

23. Monitoring of progress in capacity on the basis of the availability and quality of a core set in a specific area should be done regularly (for example, every two years) and the results reviewed by the Committee for further action.

D. Principle 4
Monitoring improvement in technical and institutional capacity

24. Considering that the Committee's goals relate to capacities for producing statistics, monitoring improvements in the technical and institutional capacity of a national statistical system is desirable. However, assessing the capacity constraints that underpin the lack of availability of a core set of statistics is potentially complex and resource-intensive on the part of member States and the secretariat. In addition, changes in capacity tend to take a long time. Thus, such monitoring should be done at longer intervals. One possibility is to carry out such assessments once every four years, and the results could be reported to the Committee at every other session.

25. While the technical capacity required for improving the availability and quality of a core set of statistics might be specific to the given area of statistics, the need for institutional capacity development within a national statistical system usually underpins statistical development across many sectors of statistical production. Each of the regional statistics development initiatives requires certain cross-cutting institutional changes in a national statistical system (including, for example, updating statistical legislation, strengthening coordination among key data producers and adopting quality assurance frameworks). This implies that, not only is it necessary to coordinate among the various regional initiatives on institutional issues, but it is also desirable to monitor progress in institutional capacity across initiatives.

26. It is therefore proposed that the Committee consider developing a common approach to monitoring institutional capacities in national statistical

systems across the region, and ensure that appropriate tools to measure institutional capacity in a reliable and efficient manner are developed.

**E. Principle 5
Common yet flexible monitoring**

27. From a regional perspective, the monitoring of national statistical capacity development is relevant only when common and comparable indicators are used across countries. While the present document defines the key elements of a common approach, its application requires flexibility, with respect to both the possible variations across specific areas of statistics development initiatives, and the inevitable differences in national capacity development needs and priorities.

28. For example, if a country has determined that a particular expected result of a regional statistics development initiative is irrelevant or not a priority, then the monitoring framework for that initiative should record that the result is not a national priority as opposed to recording that no monitoring information is being compiled.

29. In order for progress towards capacity development results to be monitored effectively, initial assessments of capacity should be encouraged to define a baseline, bearing in mind the priorities indicated by the countries involved.

**F. Principle 6
Combining regular light reporting with periodic comprehensive assessments**

30. It is proposed that the Committee at each of its biennial sessions receive reports on the progress in each of the regional initiatives that it oversees. The reports would focus on activities that national and other partners have undertaken and the results that those activities have produced.

31. Assessing progress towards achieving the goals of the regional initiatives, including the two strategic goals of the Committee, however, requires that the development of the capacities of national statistical systems be monitored comprehensively. In reference to Principle 4 above, it is proposed that such capacity assessments be conducted once every four years and the results reported to the Committee at every other session.

IV. Governance

A. Oversight and responsibility

32. Under the overall guidance of the Committee, the Bureau will be responsible for ensuring that monitoring frameworks are developed for each regional statistics capacity development initiative within its purview and that these frameworks are aligned with the approach and principles laid out in the present document.

33. Each steering or advisory group that oversee a specific regional programme will have the designated responsibility for ensuring the development and monitoring of the results framework of the regional initiative. If a monitoring framework already exists, it should be reviewed against the proposed approach outlined in the present document to ensure

that it provides an effective means of monitoring progress at the activity and results levels. Monitoring information should be reported by the respective group to the Committee (for example, the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics will be responsible for developing a monitoring framework for that programme).

34. National statistical offices and the relevant subregional, regional and international development partners will be responsible for providing the necessary monitoring information upon request.

B. Reporting and information sharing

35. Ultimately, members of the Committee are collectively accountable for achieving its two strategic goals through the implementation of the various regional statistics capacity development initiatives they have recommended. Thus, as a central part of its oversight responsibility, the Committee receives and considers reports on actions that have been taken to implement the initiatives as well as progress towards achieving its strategic goals.

36. Details related to monitoring, including monitoring instruments, as well as sources of data and the results will be shared with the Committee. This will allow the Committee to make the necessary adjustments to the regional initiatives. It will also allow other partners to see the impact of their efforts to assist Committee members in statistics development.

V. The way forward

37. The Committee may wish to review and consider the proposed approach to monitoring the work of the Committee for endorsement.

38. The Committee may also wish to provide advice on the way forward in implementing the proposed monitoring approach, particularly with respect to the following:

(a) Ensuring that each regional initiative contains a properly developed monitoring framework that is consistent with the principles of the overall monitoring approach;

(b) Considering the development of a common framework and methodology for monitoring institutional changes, in line with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics¹¹ and bearing in mind the common needs for improvements identified under the existing regional initiatives.

¹¹ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1994, Supplement No. 9* (E/1994/29), chap. V, para. 59.