

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

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**Regional initiatives: Economic statistics: Implementation
plan for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of
Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific****Report of the Steering Group for the Regional
Programme on Economic Statistics***Summary*

The present report provides an overview of the activities of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics since its establishment by the Committee on Statistics at its second session, in 2010. In particular, it provides the Committee with information on the process of the development of the Implementation Plan for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics. Taking note of the deliberations of the Steering Group summarized in the present report, the Committee may wish to consider endorsing the Implementation Plan. The Committee may wish to request the Steering Group to continue its work and to report on progress and new developments at the fourth session of the Committee, in 2014.

I. Introduction

1. The Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics was established by the Committee at its second session, in December 2010, to oversee the implementation of the regional programme for the improvement of economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific.¹ It is co-chaired by Mr. Michael Smedes (Australia) and Ms. Estela T. de Guzman (Philippines). The present report informs the Committee of the activities and outcomes of deliberations of the Steering Group. It also provides the relevant background information on the process of the development of the implementation plan² for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which was prepared for the Committee's endorsement at the present session.

2. In its decision 2/6, the Committee endorsed the proposed regional programme for the improvement of economic statistics as a formal strategy in

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

¹ See E/ESCAP/CST(2)/9, decision 2/6.

² A summary of the Implementation Plan is contained in section III.

the region. The programme aims to increase the capacity of national statistical systems in the region to produce basic economic statistics in accordance with international standards and recommended practices. In the decision, the Committee also endorsed as a proposal to transform the Technical Advisory Group for the Development of Economic Statistics into a steering group to directly oversee the implementation of the regional programme. In addition, in its recommendation 2/2, the Committee recommended the use of the core set of economic statistics³ as a regional framework to focus regional efforts, coordinate training and mobilize donor support for capacity-building.

II. Follow-up to Committee decisions

A. Establishment of the Steering Group

3. Following the establishment of the Steering Group, a call for expressions of interest was sent to Committee members to identify the composition of the group. The membership⁴ and terms of reference⁵ for the Steering Group were subsequently approved by the Bureau.

4. The Statistics Division has provided support for the Steering Group by serving as its secretariat and facilitating in-person meetings and email discussions towards developing the Implementation Plan.

B. Initial implementation of the Regional Programme

5. Following the approval of the regional programme by the Committee, a number of activities were initiated by the Statistics Division under the guidance of the Steering Group, such as in-depth capacity assessments in countries, collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division and other partners on the implementation of the System of National Accounts (SNA), and research and mapping of the ongoing activities of partners at the national and international levels towards increased capacity for producing the core set.

6. A recent example of a collaborative effort towards capacity development was an advanced training and seminar on the 2008 SNA⁶ hosted by the Bank of Korea and organized in collaboration with the ESCAP Statistics Division, the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) and the United Nations Statistics Division. The training was provided for officials from the Bank of Korea and the National Statistical Office as well as seven other national statistical offices in the Asia-Pacific region.

7. In-depth assessments of capacity to produce economic statistics were conducted in three member States: Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Lao People's Democratic Republic.⁷

³ See E/ESCAP/CST(2)/4.

⁴ www.unescap.org/stat/econ/Membership-SG-Econ-Stats.pdf.

⁵ www.unescap.org/stat/econ/TOR-ESCAP-SG.pdf.

⁶ The latest version of international statistical standard adopted by the Statistical Commission.

⁷ A synthesis of the results from the three in-depth assessments is available at www.unescap.org/stat/econ/seminar-Oct2011/11-Synthesis-report-ESCAP-assessment.pdf.

C. Commission resolutions

8. In its resolution 67/11 of 25 May 2011 on strengthening statistical capacity in Asia and the Pacific, the Commission endorsed the strategic direction of the Committee on Statistics, as proposed by the Committee in its recommendation 2/1, with the two overarching goals of (a) ensuring that all countries in the region have the capability to provide an agreed basic range of population, economic, social and environmental statistics by 2020, and (b) creating a more adaptive and cost-effective information management environment for national statistical offices through stronger collaboration. In the resolution, the Commission called on members and, as appropriate, associate members to prioritize the strengthening of their national statistical systems and to align resources and institutional arrangements to support the achievement of these goals in Asia and the Pacific by 2020 and requested the Executive Secretary to facilitate the coordination of international capacity-building activities related to the development of official statistics in the region.

9. In its 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, the Commission endorsed the recommendation of the Committee to use the core set as a regional framework to focus regional efforts, coordinate training and mobilize donor support for capacity-building. The Commission also recommended that members and associate members use, as appropriate, the core set as a framework and guide in the development of their national statistical systems.

III. Development of the Implementation Plan for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific

A. Key events

10. The Steering Group engaged in extensive discussions on the implementation of the Regional Programme. These discussions began at the Steering Group's first meeting in October 2011, which was organized in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division and in connection with a seminar on economic statistics capacity development and the 2008 SNA, and culminated at its second meeting, which was held in August 2012.

11. During the period between the two Steering Group meetings, subgroups were established to engage in more detailed consultations via email discussions. A technical meeting was organized in July 2012 to synthesize the results of the subgroup consultations.

B. Outcomes

12. The Implementation Plan and its associated resources, such as the Capacity Screening Tool, are the principal outcomes from the deliberations of the Steering Group. During these deliberations, several key decisions were made on the approaches of the Regional Programme, which form the foundation for the strategy and selection of activities in the Implementation Plan. These key decisions are summarized below.

13. *Strategy for developing the Implementation Plan:* The deliberations at the first meeting of the Steering Group identified (a) assessment, (b)

technical capacity and (c) institutional setting as prerequisites for addressing the challenges outlined in the seven components of the Regional Programme.⁸ Hence, three subgroups were established to focus on each of these three aspects of the Implementation Plan.

14. *Capacity screening:* The Steering Group decided that broad, core capacity constraints of national statistical systems should be identified and classified in the initial phase in order to focus and structure capacity development efforts and help coordinate and attract support for the activities of international partners. The agreed approach is a relatively broad “capacity screening” rather than an intensive and in-depth assessment of every statistical system in the region. There may be a need for more detailed follow-up assessments on the production of the core set in accordance with international standards and guidelines.

15. *Focus on national action:* The Steering Group recognized that achievement of the broad programme goal would only be possible with a significant commitment by each national statistical office in the region. Hence, the primary focus and responsibility for the implementation of activities that address the priority constraints towards producing the core set lie with the national statistical systems. Assistance with successful completion of activities identified under the Regional Programme may be provided through international cooperation and direct assistance from the United Nations and other international development agencies. Particular attention will be given to the identification of cross-country exchanges and other opportunities for South-South cooperation among national statistical systems in the region.

16. *Link to the Action Plan on Agricultural and Rural Statistics and other Committee programmes:* The Steering Group for Agricultural Statistics was established to oversee the regional implementation of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics. The Committee had originally made the Steering Group for Agricultural Statistics a subgroup of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics. The deliberations between the two groups have been coordinated and have involved overlapping participation, with support from the Statistics Division. Both the Steering Group for Agricultural Statistics and the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics have recognized a commonality in approach and content between their respective programmes, in particular with regard to institutional aspects. Institutional constraints and the activities aimed at addressing these constraints (such as increased advocacy for improving economic statistics and strengthening of statistical coordination and legislation) will be common to the Committee’s statistical development initiatives in all domains of statistics.

C. The role of the Statistics Division

17. The first step in the implementation of the Regional Programme is to screen for capacity constraints that countries face in their efforts to produce the core set. The secretariat will administer the process of conducting the capacity screening, including by pre-filling the questionnaires and analysing the results. ESCAP and members of the Steering Group organized a pilot testing of the Capacity Screening Tool in October and November 2012. A final version of the Tool, which will be accessible in English and Russian, will be available by January 2013.

⁸ E/ESCAP/CST(2)/5.

18. Members of the Committee will arrange for a focal point for the Regional Programme, who will be responsible for completing the capacity screening for submission to ESCAP during the first quarter of 2013. Members of the Steering Group will function as national focal points for their respective countries. For all other member States, a request will be sent to heads of statistical offices to nominate one or more focal points from their respective statistical systems.

19. Following the capacity screening, more in-depth national assessments may be undertaken for particular areas of the national statistical systems, as necessary. The results of the capacity screening, along with other assessments and existing strategic plans, will be utilized in the development of national activity plans, which outline the targeted national activities towards achieving capacities for producing the core set. The results will also be utilized to help identify possibilities for intercountry assistance towards the same goal. The Steering Group plans to hold its next meeting towards the end of 2013 to review the compilation of national activity plans, assess the progress of implementation of the Regional Programme, and reassess the strategy and planned activities ahead.

20. A number of capacity development activities have been planned at both the regional and national levels for the coming years. These activities, and some principles for their implementation, are described in greater detail in the Implementation Plan.

IV. Summary of the Implementation Plan

21. The proposed Implementation Plan is designed to achieve the results outlined in the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, as endorsed by the Committee on Statistics in 2010. Under the overall goal that all countries in the region attain the capacity to produce the core set of economic statistics, the Implementation Plan is designed to produce four critical outputs:

(a) Output A (Advocacy): Increased political support and appreciation of the importance of investing in the improvement of national capacity to produce the core set;

(b) Output B (Coordination): Improved coordination of statistics activities within NSSs and among development partners;

(c) Output C (Infrastructure): Improved national statistical infrastructure for the production and dissemination of the core set;

(d) Output D (Skills): Improved human resource skills of NSS staff in areas that are essential for the collection of economic data and for the compilation, dissemination and use of the core set.

22. In order to address the key institutional and technical capacity constraints that hinder the capacity of NSSs to provide the core set, the Implementation Plan follows a strategy that is anchored around four approaches: (a) combining country implementation with regional support; (b) aligning with relevant global, regional and subregional initiatives and coordinating implementation activities among development partners; (c) embracing a phased approach towards progressive achievement of the expected outcome; and (d) monitoring actions and progress regularly for sustained efforts and desired results.

23. The implementation of the Regional Programme is to be guided by the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics (under an overall programme governance structure that includes both regional and country-level arrangements). While the current Implementation Plan focuses on a set of proposed national and regional support actions during the first phase of implementation, the Steering Group will direct the further development of the Implementation Plan for the subsequent phases and provide the secretariat with both strategic and technical advice for the day-to-day management of the implementation activities, monitor progress and propose any adjustments to the Implementation Plan as the need arises.

IV. Actions to be taken by the Committee

24. Taking note of the key outcomes from the deliberations of the Steering Group summarized above, the Committee is invited to consider the endorsement of the Implementation Plan for the Regional Programme.

25. The Committee may wish to provide guidance on the implementation strategy, noting that capacity development programmes in different domains, developed in pursuance of the Committee's goals, will have common elements related to institutional development of national statistical systems.⁹

26. The Committee may wish to request the Steering Group to continue its work and to report on progress and new developments at the fourth session of the Committee, in 2014.

⁹ See E/ESCAP/CST(3)/2.