

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

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Activities not classified by field: Follow-up to Economic and Social Council policy decisions

Draft report of the Statistical Commission to ECOSOC on indicators

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ECOSOC Decision 2002/311:

Report of the Statistical Commission on its thirty-third session and the progress report of the Secretary-General on the basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels

At its 45th plenary meeting, on 19 December 2002, the Economic and Social Council:

(a) Took note of the report of the Statistical Commission on its thirty-third session *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 4 (E/2002/24)*, and of the progress report of the Secretary-General on the basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels; E/2002/53.

(b) Requested the Statistical Commission to provide a separate comprehensive report on the work related to chapter VI, section E, of the report of the Commission on its thirty-third session and on the basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels, including the Report on Indicators on Means of Implementation, to the Council at its substantive session of 2003 for consideration and guidance.

I. Introduction

1. This report was prepared by the Statistical Commission at the request of ECOSOC in its decision 2002/311. This report gives a brief overview on the discussion on basic indicators at both ECOSOC and the Statistical Commission in the past years and comments upon the specific issues identified in ECOSOC resolution 2000/27. In each section of this report some proposals for future activities are made.

2. ECOSOC and the Statistical Commission have been engaged in a discussion of basic indicators related to the recent UN conferences and summits since 1998. A comprehensive listing of ECOSOC decisions and resolutions, as well as of ECOSOC and Statistical Commission reports is given as background reference material in Annex 1.

3. At its substantive session of 2000, the Economic and Social Council had reiterated its interest in the topic of statistical indicators to follow up major United Nations conferences and summits held in the 1990s. The Council adopted resolution 2000/27, which reaffirmed recommendations contained in an earlier resolution on indicators (Council resolution 1999/55 of 30 July 1999, sect. II) and took up many of its themes. Inter alia, the resolution called for: (a) statistical capacity-building; (b) the technical review of existing conference indicators and efforts to define a limited set; (c) the need for so-called “means of implementation” or “global partnership for development” indicators; and (d) the promotion of networking. The Council had requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of resolution 2000/27 at its substantive session of 2002.

4. The Statistical Commission at its thirty-second session in 2001 accepted the invitation by the Economic and Social Council to serve as the intergovernmental focal point for the review of conference indicators and considered this work as a welcome opportunity to contribute its technical expertise to the ongoing debate on indicators.¹ In order to ensure that the statistical expertise of member States be fully applied, the Chairman of the Statistical Commission appointed a “Friends of the Chair” (FOC) Advisory Group to conduct an in-depth technical evaluation of all United Nations conference indicators.² In accordance with the Economic and Social Council mandate, the Friends of the Chair Advisory Group was also asked to elaborate recommendations for a basic list of indicators for conference follow-up and to make proposals for a mechanism of statistical review for future indicators.

5. The Friends of the Chair Advisory Group reported back to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-third session in 2002 presenting its “Report of the Friends of the Chair of the Statistical Commission on an assessment of the statistical indicators derived from United Nations conferences and summits” (E/CN.3/2002/26). The Statistical Commission considered this report together with the report of the Secretary-General on the harmonization of development indicators (E/CN.3/2002/25) and a consultancy report entitled “Indicators on means of implementation.” The Statistical Commission welcomed the report of the Friends of the Chair and was particularly satisfied with the broad consultative process among member States undertaken by the Group. It welcomed the indicator architecture built on three tiers and the technical evaluations contained on the United Nations Statistics Division website and endorsed the recommendations made in the report. The Statistical Commission also concurred that in some areas (e.g. human rights and good governance indicators), the indicators currently proposed are mostly qualitative in nature and could therefore not be technically evaluated by the Friends of the Chair group. Therefore, in

case that a consensus among member States is reached to use such indicators, from a technical statistical point of view further work would be required to clarify concepts and methods.

6. Based on the report of the Friends of the Chair and the decisions taken at the last session of the Statistical Commission in 2002, the United Nations Statistics Division prepared a report for the Economic and Social Council entitled “Progress report on basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels (E/2002/53)”. This report took up all the issues as listed in the above mentioned ECOSOC resolution. The following sections lists those issues and summarize briefly the present status of the international debate.

II. Strengthening of national statistical capacity

7. Presently the national and international demand for statistical baseline data and indicators far exceeds the capacity of most national statistical systems to supply such information. Therefore, the statistical capacity especially of developing countries needs to be strengthened. The Statistical Commission regularly includes an agenda item on statistical capacity building on its agenda. At its thirty-third session in 2002 it stressed that statistical capacity-building efforts and related technical cooperation activities need to be embedded within the national framework of development policies. It also emphasized the need to build the demand for statistics in order to secure sufficient national resources to build and sustain statistical capacity. The Commission agreed that to accomplish these objectives a broad spectrum of the user community, including policy decision makers, mass media, research institutions, universities and the public at large, needs to be engaged. The Commission also stressed the importance of South-South cooperation and high-profile peer reviews. The United Nations Statistics Division in close cooperation with the funding and specialized agencies of the United Nations system has continued to support countries in the efforts to build national statistical capacity, through its advisory services and its series of training workshops.

8. In an effort to mobilize resources towards capacity-building in statistics and to encourage the coordination of statistical capacity-building programmes, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Secretariat and a number of bilateral donors launched the initiative PARIS 21 (Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century). PARIS 21 has been established as a global forum and network to promote, influence and facilitate statistical capacity-building activities and the better use of statistics. Its work is guided by an annual Consortium meeting and a Steering Committee of representatives of developing and transition countries, donors and international organizations. The Consortium is co-chaired by a member of the Bureau of the Statistical Commission and the Chair of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The PARIS21 secretariat annually reports to the Statistical Commission on its programme of work.

9. Still, more attention to statistical capacity building is needed especially at the political level. The Statistical Commission calls upon the Economic and Social Council and international donors to recognize the need to support and develop core statistical capacity within member States, including statistical infrastructure, and recommends that all donor activity for statistics should recognize the need to address both national and international statistical requirements. As part of this recognition, the Statistical Commission recommends, furthermore, that the Council and the international organizations and donors should promote the use of statistics to support effective national policy development and good public administration.

III. Review of new indicators used in the United Nations system

10. In its technical review of indicators the Statistical Commission came to the conclusion that the work to establish new indicators should begin as part of the preparation of any forthcoming major conference or summit and should involve both policy officials and statisticians from both international organizations and member States. Any new indicator requirement should be seen within the wider context of the totality of indicator needs. As such, emerging needs must be set alongside existing needs. The statistical experts stressed that the development of new indicators should be reconciled with national policy needs for statistics and should take account of the statistical capacity of countries to produce them. National statisticians should be involved. Since they are closer to the raw data, they have a unique perspective on the technical properties of indicators, the availability of any proposed indicator and the data-collection and resource implications.

11. In order to translate these general principles into concrete mechanisms, the Statistical Commission recommends that advanced planning for United Nations summits and major conferences should trigger a broad consultation process, including both policy officials and statisticians within the international agencies, in particular the United Nations Statistics Division. The Statistics Division should ensure that national statisticians are consulted during the development process, with due consideration given to regional balance. Proposals for new indicators should be made to the Statistical Commission, which would report to the Economic and Social Council.

IV. Technical review and simplification of sets of indicators

12. The Economic and Social Council invited the Statistical Commission, as its authoritative technical body, to make recommendations regarding a limited list of conference indicators. For this purpose the Statistical Commission established at its thirty-second session (2001) an expert group of Friends of the Chair of the Statistical Commission. Eminent national statistical experts from 34 member States contributed to the work of Friends of the Chair group, who prepared an extensive analytical report with detailed recommendations. The expert group was particularly concerned to propose mechanisms to ensure a greater participation of Member States in the development and adoption of statistical indicators for global and national purposes. The report was presented to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-third session (E/CN.3/2002/26). The

Statistical Commission endorsed the findings of the Friends of the Chair expert group and recommended that its report be transmitted to the Economic and Social Council.

13. In response to the request for a limited list of conference indicators, the Friends of the Chair expert group elaborated an indicator framework containing three priority tiers, each with approximately 40 statistical indicators. The Friends of the Chair expert group recognized that the proposed framework must be kept under review to allow, for instance, further development in response to emerging needs with respect to future summits and major conferences. The Statistical Commission therefore established a standing advisory committee, consisting of 11 senior government statisticians from member states. The main task of the proposed standing advisory committee will be to periodically update the indicator framework provided in the Friends of the Chair report, in response to United Nations summits and major international conferences and taking into account development of indicators within international agencies and advances in technical standards. For instance, in the context of the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in September 2002, the standing advisory committee will open a dialogue with the concerned stakeholders (United Nations system organizations, inter-governmental bodies and technical specialists) to review required and proposed indicators according to their technical merits.

14. The Friends of the Chair expert group had included the proposed Millennium indicator set contained as contained in the 'roadmap' report to the General Assembly in their technical analysis and agreed that many of the millennium indicators corresponded to their high priority assessment as expressed by the tier-system. However for a few selected indicators the statistical experts expressed reservations with respect to the conceptual clarity of the indicators or with respect to their insufficient present methodological development, which often explains the serious lack of data for many countries. The Statistical Commission at its session in 2002 voiced the concern that the development of the millennium development goals indicator set was a parallel process with insufficient country involvement that had not been coordinated with the current efforts of the Commission to follow up on Economic and Social Council resolutions concerning indicators.

15. In an effort to connect the two processes mentioned above, the Statistical Commission may ask its standing advisory committee on indicators to focus its particular attention on the improvement of the metadata for the millennium indicators. Improvement of the metadata base for the millennium indicators will not only enhance the transparency of the millennium indicators, but it will also help to clarify outstanding conceptual and methodological problems that still need to be addressed. Furthermore, comprehensive metadata, including detailed conceptual and methodological notes are helpful for those countries that wish to assess and ultimately improve their capacity to compile specific indicators in the future.

16. In this context UNSD is also coordinating closely with UNDP and other partners in the UN Development group in the preparation of MDG country reports. For example, UNSD participated in training workshops held by UNDP to assist country teams in the preparation of national reports. The United Nations Statistics Division sees this collaboration also as an opportunity to assess countries' statistical needs and to keep the MDGs reporting closely linked to national statistical programmes.

V. Indicators on means of implementation

17. The present high demand for indicators of means of implementation by the policy decision makers poses two types of challenges. The first challenge is identifying a short list of indicators that can be widely used by the United Nations political bodies and the media. The second challenge is creating the capacity for estimating these indicators at a satisfactory quality level.

18. In an effort to further develop indicators on means of implementation, the United Nations Statistics Division had commissioned a desk study by a statistical and developmental expert³. The report analyzes the United Nations Millennium Declaration (Goal 8 entitled “Develop a global partnership for development”) and the documentation related to the International Conference on Financing for Development (Monterrey, 18-22 March 2002) and identifies 17 broad categories of means of implementation (such as official development assistance (ODA) macroresources, external debt relief, international trade, approval and ratification of treaties, ODA by purpose, foreign direct investment (FDI) etc.). For some of these categories, well-defined indicators have been developed and are being compiled. The report lists those indicators with their respective data sources. For the areas where this is not the case the report attempts to assess the nature and magnitude of the efforts still needed.

19. It is suggested that the standing advisory committee on indicators of the Statistical Commission in its effort to review the statistical implications of recent major UN conferences and summits pay particular attention to the International Conference on Financing for Development (ICFD, Monterrey 2002) and examine, together with the follow-up secretariat for this conference in DESA, what indicators are presently available and what indicators are still needed to monitor progress towards the objectives of ICFD.

VI. Effective coordination of statistics in the UN system

20. There are currently two processes through which the Statistics Division actively assumes its role as focal point for statistical coordination in the UN system: (i) as the secretariat of the newly created Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) and (ii) as the designated unit to coordinate the preparation of the statistical inputs into the Secretary General's annual report on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

21. The reform of the ACC machinery which created the new United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination effectively disbanded the ACC subcommittees, including the one on statistical activities. However, upon the invitation of the Statistical Commission, the Statistics Division together with its statistical partners in the UN system explored ways to continue the necessary process of close cooperation in the exchange of data and metadata. As a consequence the CCSA was formed, which had its first meeting in March 2003.

22. The other concrete area in which the United Nations Statistics Division has assumed a leadership role is the preparation of the global annual reports for the General Assembly to monitor progress towards the development goals contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The Statistics Division provides the statistical basis for these progress reports, pulling thereby together global statistical sources and analyses from the United Nations systems. All available data are being included in the United Nations Statistics Division's web site (<http://millenniumindicators.un.org>), where they are fully accessible to national and international statistical services, Governments and the public. In compiling these data, complete documentation is also being collected by the Statistics Division. Partner agencies are expected to ensure that data are based on a reliable and documented national source.

23. Despite these encouraging examples of inter-agency cooperation, the goal of effective coordination among the statistical units of the United Nations system and beyond remains a continuous and long-term one. Member States are still concerned about being overburdened with data questionnaires received from the international organizations and about inconsistencies in the publication of data (sometimes between agencies or between national and international publications). There is at present no effective coordinating mechanism that looks at the issuance of questionnaires or at estimation and aggregation methods. Encouraged by the Statistical Commission, the United Nations Statistics Division had asked member States to keep the Statistics Division informed about specific examples of duplicative data collections. The Commission can and will continue to flag these problems, using its technical authority to influence concerned parties with respect to cooperating or to converging in their practices.

Annex I

ECOSOC

1. Decisions and Resolutions:

Decision 2002/311:

Report of the Statistical Commission on its thirty-third session and the progress report of the Secretary-General on the basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels

Resolution 2000/27:

Basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences & summits.

Resolution 1999/55 Sect II:

Basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences & summits.

Decision 1998/290:

Basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of the major United Nations conferences.

2. Reports to ECOSOC:

E/2002/53:

Progress report on basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences & summits at all levels: Report of the S-G.

E/2000/60:

Progress report on basic indicators for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits at all levels

E/1999/11:

Integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of major United Nations conferences and summits: a critical review of the development of indicators in the context of conference follow-up.

Statistical Commission:

E/CN.3/2003/21

Report of the Secretary-General on harmonization of indicators & reporting on progress toward the millennium development goals;

E.CN.3/2002/26

Report of the Friends of the Chair of the Statistical Commission on an assessment of the statistical indicators derived from the United Nations summit meetings

E/CN.3/2002/25

Report of the Secretary-General on harmonization of development indicators

E/CN.3/2001/16

Report of Secretary-General on activities and plans of the United Nations Statistics Division and the Statistical Commission in support of the harmonization and rationalization of indicators

E/CN.3/2000/15 Report of the Secretary-General on the harmonization and rationalization of development indicators in the United Nations System.

E/CN.3/1999/14 Report of the Secretary-General on the harmonization and rationalization of development indicators in the United Nations system.

¹ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Supplement No. 4 (E/2001/24), para. 45(a)

² For this purpose the United Nations Statistics Division had compiled from United Nations documents a list of approximately 280 indicators which were being used, or which were proposed to be used, in the context of follow-up to United Nations conferences and summits.

³ The report "Indicators on means of implementation" a room document accompanying E/CN.3/2002/26 is available on the UN Statistics Division website at <<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2002.htm>>