



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

Statement on Programme Issues by Mr. Paul Cheung, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division to the 39th Session of the Statistical Commission
New York, 29 February 2008

Agenda item 5: Programme Questions

Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

My statement on programme issues has two parts. I will first like to make some remarks regarding the conduct of the 39th session of the UN Statistical Commission. I will then introduce some new elements of the work programme of the UN Statistics Division for the current year and the near future.

Programme aspects related to the Statistical Commission

I am happy to report that over 125 countries represented by their national statistical offices and 38 international agencies participated in the 39th Session of the Commission and the side events. I would like to put on record my appreciation to all national statistical offices and international agencies which have helped in the preparation process. Special thanks go to the 25 speakers of the side events. I would like in particular to acknowledge the assistance of Statistics Finland for organizing the seminar on using administrative data sources, the Office of National Statistics of the United Kingdom for preparing the programme review, and the Statistical offices of Switzerland and Norway for being the conveners of the Friends of the Chair Groups. We look forward to similar support from other countries in the future, especially in organizing side events. We would also like to thank the 30 African countries that have provided publicity material for the exhibition on statistical development in Africa, which was an overwhelming success. I am thankful for the facilitation provided by France, Sweden, United Kingdom, ECOWAS Secretariat, PARIS21, UNFPA and the World Bank to some countries for their participation.

This Commission has considered 33 substantive papers, of which 15 were for discussion and 18 for information. The papers were posted on the web on time in six official languages. The feedback I received was that the Commission is satisfied with the current methods of work, the documentation, and the distinction between discussion and information papers. The secretariat has worked continuously with the Bureau to review

the methods of work. I am pleased that the new arrangement of considering all information papers as a block has further enhanced the efficient deliberation of the Commission.

In my statement last year, I indicated that I'll discuss with the Bureau on its extended role of facilitating and coordinating the development of the global statistical system and to advise UNSD on its work programme. A first informal dialogue with some member states was held in November last year. Additional dialogues will be held with the member states to broaden the consultation process. I'll report back to the Commission in due course on the recommendations.

Programme aspects related to the work of United Nations Statistics Division

Let me now turn more specifically to the work programme of the UN Statistics Division (UNSD).

In my statement last year, I stressed that UNSD will focus its efforts on issues relevant to the compilation of basic statistics. This will continue, and a programme of work has been planned accordingly, for all regions in collaboration with Regional Commissions and international agencies. Associated with these efforts is our continuing emphasis to broaden our outreach. A key objective of our work at UNSD is to bring as many country participants to our core activities as possible. In 2006-07, our programmes comprised over 100 events, with 3,727 country representatives, almost 100% higher than the previous biennium. The number of UNSD funded participants increased by over 65% to about 1,000 persons for these two years. At UNSD, our workshops systematically include participants from statistical offices as well as from other line ministries and representatives of the user groups.

I'll now describe some specific initiatives.

Spatial Data Infrastructure

Detailed geographical information is increasingly relevant for development analysis and policy decision making. We believe that there are enormous benefits to be derived from a further systematic integration of geographical and statistical information, and putting in place appropriate infrastructure for the integration of the two. In many countries, geographic and spatial information is at this point still dispersed and the capabilities of countries to effectively apply GIS systems are limited. In our Global Programme on Population and Housing Census, some initial work has been done taking advantage of the census activities. In addition, the United Nations Regional Cartographic conferences, which are facilitated by the Statistics Division, have called for the development of national spatial data infrastructures. At the United Nations, the UN Working Geospatial Information Group (UNWGIG) brings together UN professionals working in the field of cartography and geospatial information management on common geospatial issues, such as maps, boundaries, data exchange, standards and naming conventions.

UNSD intends to extend its activities to the area of spatial data infrastructure and will develop an integrated work programme to bring together statistical data and spatial information. I will be consulting with countries that are successful in this integration and will report back to the Commission in due course.

Climate Change and Official Statistics

UNSD is actively preparing for a Conference on Climate Change and Official Statistics in collaboration with Eurostat, the World Bank and Statistics Norway. It will be held in Oslo from 14-16 April. Invitation letters have been sent to all National Statistical Offices. This needs to become an important topic for official statisticians. Climate change is one of the most important policy issues facing the world today. Many countries are addressing the issues related to climate change. Some are trying to understand the impacts of climate change and what should be done to adapt; other are tracking emissions

statistics or helping to find appropriate mitigation strategies. But still a significant number of statistical offices are either not involved in this work or only involved at the margin, although the official statistics community can provide significant contributions to inform the climate change debate.

The preparation time for this Conference is relatively short but, in view of the importance of the topic, I think it is imperative to hold it rather quickly. We also thought it important that it not just be a conference of official statisticians but there be a good representation of policy makers and scientists. We have secured some excellent speakers from outside the statistical world. It is a high level conference and I hope that many of you will be able to attend. A copy of the provisional program has been circulated this week.

One of the important outcomes of the Conference will be an agenda for action by both international and national statistical agencies. This will be brought to the next Session of UNSC, as a programme review report, for discussion and endorsement.

National Quality Assessment Framework

At its September meeting, the CCSA spent a considerable amount of time discussing the implementation of quality assessment frameworks. It discussed the quality guidelines prepared by Eurostat to facilitate the implementation of quality assurance frameworks in international organizations. This raises the question of what quality assessment framework should apply at the national level. Quality assurance is an essential part of our work and I am sure that the Statistical Offices of many countries could benefit from a review of the schemes that currently exist at both international and national levels. I will continue to consult with countries on how to proceed with this.

Violence against women

The General Assembly, in its resolution in 2007, entitled “Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women” (Resolution 62/133), has specifically requested the Statistical Commission to "develop and propose, in consultation with the Commission on the Status of Women, a set of possible indicators on violence against women in order to assist States in assessing the scope, prevalence and incidence of violence against women". To fulfill the mandate given by the General Assembly, UNECE, UNDAW and UNSD, in collaboration with ECLAC, ESCWA, ESCAP, and ECA had convened a group of experts in Geneva, from 8-10 October 2007, which resulted in the proposal of a preliminary list of indicators. This list was discussed yesterday, at a joint panel discussion between the Statistical Commission and the Commission on the Status of Women. In order to conduct a more in-depth technical review of the proposed indicators, Mexico has offered to lead a Friends of the Chair group on this topic and to prepare a report for the Statistical Commission's consideration at its 2009 session. The Chair has agreed to this proposal. I invite interested countries to participate in this effort. UNSD will support the work of the Friends of the Chair group as part of its Global Programme on Gender Statistics. A Global Forum on gender statistics was organized by ISTAT and the United Nations (UNSD, UNDAW, UNFPA and UNECE), in collaboration with the World Bank in Rome, Italy from 10-12 December 2007. More activities on gender statistics will be organized under this Global programme in the coming years.

Data dissemination

After the successful launch of the UNdata portal, which brings together major UN databases into one single internet environment, UNSD will continue to improve and expand this powerful and innovative tool. The main efforts in the coming weeks and months will go into the direction of (i) extending the data coverage of the system, by incorporating more and more UN system data bases, (ii) expanding the meta data content of UNdata and (iii) continuing to improve the functionalities of the system in light of

user-feedback, especially with respect to data visualization. The work on UNdata is part of the overall work programme of UNSD to improve data dissemination tools, and to assist member states, to strengthen their dissemination capacities, especially by fostering more systematic exchange of experiences among countries and international agencies. We will also continue to disseminate best practices in the management of national statistical offices through a special newly designed website, dedicated to this topic.

Seminar on Official Statistics

We have had a very successful seminar on Friday to discuss the new directions of social statistics. UNSD will organize an expert group meeting to further discuss the key conclusions of this seminar and will bring the report to the Commission in 2009. South Africa has offered to host a City Group to work towards solutions to some of the issues posed at the seminar. I would invite South Africa to introduce the terms of reference of this proposed City Group at the forthcoming Expert Group Meeting and submit them for approval to the Commission in 2009.

I would like to announce that the topic for next year's Friday seminar before the Commission week will be on Innovations in Official statistics. Many statistical offices have placed great importance on continuous innovation in products, services and governance. I understand the Office of National Statistics of UK will soon recruit a Director of Innovation. At the High Level Forum on Monday, we also heard a clear message on the importance of innovation. I believe there are a great number of innovations in official statistics around the world. I hope we will be able to discuss these innovations in this seminar to be held on 20 February 2009. I invite the countries to make suggestions on how to organize this Innovation Seminar and to provide concrete examples of innovations.

UNSD Work Programme 2008-2009 and Strategic framework 2010-2011

As you may know, the UN functions in a two-year budgetary cycle. The budget and work programme for the years 2008 and 2009 had been adopted by the General Assembly last year and the Commission had taken note of the Division's current work programme in its 38th Session. We have also prepared a proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2010-2011. It is available as a background document for the Commission's review and comments. The detailed biennial programme plan for the 2010-2011 cycle, modified as appropriate, will be presented to the Commission at its 40th session in 2009.

Thank you.