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REGIONAL TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN STATISTICS DEVELOPMENT

(Item 4 of the provisional agenda)

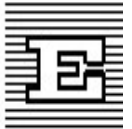
**ESCAP STRATEGY FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN STATISTICS
DEVELOPMENT**

Note by the secretariat

Corrigendum

The dates of the session *should read* as above.

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15-17 December 2008
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DEVELOPMENT**

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SUMMARY

The present document contains a report by the secretariat on the proposed strategy of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) for technical cooperation in statistics development in the Asia-Pacific region and the implementation of technical cooperation in this area in recent years. It describes the current structure of subprogramme 2, Statistics, and highlights its statistics development component, which is managed by the Statistics Division. It defines the comparative advantage that ESCAP has in promoting statistical capacity-building in the region and outlines a set of guiding principles that form the current strategy for technical cooperation being pursued under the statistics development programme. It also discusses the complementary roles that could be played by the Statistics Division and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) under the auspices of the subprogramme. It provides an overview of the recent and ongoing technical cooperation activities undertaken by the Statistics Division and identifies a number of areas for priority consideration in formulating future programme activities.

The Committee may wish to review the proposed ESCAP technical cooperation strategy for statistics development and provide guidance and advice on future priorities and on a suitable approach to helping to strengthen the statistics development programme and its impact.

* Reissued for technical reasons.

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Introduction

1. Over the past decade, many countries in the Asia-Pacific region have made significant progress in strengthening their national statistical capacities to produce timely and reliable statistics for policymaking and progress assessments. The global commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and targets—along with the accompanying monitoring requirements—has generated unprecedented momentum among all development partners to further promote statistics development.

2. Still, enormous challenges remain. Many developing countries, especially the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, are struggling to produce statistics for even some of the most basic development indicators. Other countries that are striving to implement new or revised international standards in various areas of official statistics are often in need of targeted technical training and support. Meanwhile, many emerging and urgent global policy issues, such as those related to inclusive and sustainable development, require the statistical community to respond collectively with better measurements and relevant data.

3. Having assessed the changing needs for statistical capacity-building¹ in the Asia-Pacific region and reflected upon its own comparative advantages, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has, in recent years, been moving towards a new strategy for technical cooperation in statistics development in the region. The elaboration of this strategy has been guided by the priorities for statistics development proposed by global initiatives, such as the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics,² and by the current strategic direction of ESCAP. Under the leadership of its new Executive Secretary, ESCAP is repositioning itself as a regional hub that assists countries through technical cooperation and by providing sound strategic analysis for the development of policy options. The goal of this assistance is to ensure that member States have the tools and knowledge they need to make informed decisions about development challenges. ESCAP has advocated inclusive and sustainable development in a region that is challenged by growing inequalities and persistent poverty in spite of its high growth rate. It has also championed institutional change and development effectiveness and given priority to cultivating regional cooperation and strong partnerships.

4. The present document describes the current structure of subprogramme 2, Statistics, and highlights its statistics development component, which is managed by the Statistics Division. It

¹ “Statistical capacity-building is defined as activities that strengthen the pillars of statistical capacity. Statistical capacity refers to the ability of statistical producers to serve the needs of users with quality statistics that meet the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Quality includes timeliness, reliability, accessibility and relevance, and can be measured by the Data Quality Assessment Framework.” (Mary Strode, Ian MacAuslan, Christine Spanneut, Matthew Powell, Christopher Willoughby, Philippe Ngango Gafishi and Thomas Thomsen, “Evaluation framework for statistical capacity building”, First Draft, Synthesis Report, Part 1, United Kingdom Department for International Development Ref:EVD:051 (Oxford Policy Management, May 2008, p. v)).

² The Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics was adopted at the Second International Roundtable on Managing for Development Results, Marrakech, Morocco, 4-5 February 2004 (available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc04/marrakech.pdf>).

defines the comparative advantage that ESCAP has in promoting statistical capacity-building in the region and outlines a set of guiding principles that form the current strategy for the technical cooperation programme managed by the Statistics Division. It also discusses the complementary roles that could be played by the Statistics Division and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) under the auspices of the subprogramme.

5. The report provides an overview of the recent and ongoing technical cooperation activities undertaken by the Statistics Division and identifies a number of areas for priority consideration in formulating future programme activities.

I. STATISTICS DEVELOPMENT: A COMPONENT OF THE STATISTICS SUBPROGRAMME

A. The statistics subprogramme

6. ESCAP, through its statistics subprogramme, is striving to become (a) a strong regional actor in promoting the development and implementation of international statistical standards and supporting the strengthening of national statistical institutions; (b) a key producer of user-friendly regional statistical information and products that meet regional needs and the internal needs of ESCAP; and (c) a regional centre of excellence in the statistical analysis of social, economic and environmental development issues.

7. This ambition reflects the objectives of the three strategic components of the ESCAP statistics subprogramme: technical cooperation in statistics development, data support and dissemination, and statistical analyses. The overall goal of the subprogramme is to increase the use of statistics for evidence-based decision-making and to foster the development and dissemination of key demographic, social, economic and environmental statistics in the ESCAP region that adhere to internationally agreed standards (E/ESCAP/CST/9).

8. The statistics subprogramme is under the responsibility of the ESCAP Statistics Division and supported by SIAP. Its mandate stems from a number of resolutions of the Economic and Social Council, including resolution 2006/6 of 24 July 2006 on strengthening statistical capacity, and ESCAP, including resolution 62/10 of 12 April 2006 on strengthening statistical capacity in Asia and the Pacific and resolution 61/2 of 18 May 2005, the Statute of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific.

9. The work programme of the Statistics Division is largely guided by discussions at the annual sessions of the Commission and at the biennial sessions of its Committee on Statistics,³ which brings together the heads of national statistical offices from all members and associate members of the

³ During the period 2003-2007, the statistics subprogramme was under the Committee on Poverty Reduction, which met annually.

Commission and from subregional, regional and international statistical agencies. The Committee had functioned until 2002 and was re-established by the Commission at its sixty-fourth session, in April 2008.⁴

10. As a training institution, SIAP provides training to official statisticians in developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region and facilitates the development of national statistical training capacities. Since its establishment in 1970, the Institute had operated on a project basis until it became a subsidiary body of ESCAP in 1995.⁵ The work programme of SIAP has been integrated into the strategic framework of ESCAP as a component of the statistics subprogramme since 2006. Guidance on the functioning of the Institute is provided by its Governing Council and by the Commission. According to Commission resolution 64/1 of 30 April 2008 on the restructuring of the conference structure of the Commission, the Committee on Statistics shall provide the secretariat with guidance in reviewing the proposed strategic framework and programme of work of SIAP.⁶

11. To further the goals of resolution 64/1, the Statistics Division has also been reorganized; it now has two sections: (a) the Statistical Development and Analysis Section; and (b) the Data Support and Dissemination Section. This structure reflects a shift in the Division's strategic focus to meet the increasing demand for results-oriented services. For example, instead of producing statistical publications based on unverified data collected from member States, the current Data Support and Dissemination Section will (a) compile, validate and disseminate data for both external users (e.g. the public and private sectors, civil society and the media) and for internal ESCAP users (e.g. substantive divisions); (b) provide a data management platform for the diverse data holdings of various divisions in the ESCAP secretariat and work towards full harmonization so that ESCAP will become the key regional repository of internationally comparable development data on social, economic and environmental issues; and (c) provide technical assistance to member States in the dissemination of national statistics.

12. Two broad types of statistical analyses are undertaken by the Statistics Division. The first are empirical analyses carried out within specific technical cooperation projects related to standard development. Such analyses often take the form of joint post-pilot studies with project countries, which contribute to the formulation of recommendations and can serve to strengthen the technical and analytical capacities of a national statistical system in a given statistical area.

13. The second type are statistical analyses of regional development issues, to which the Statistics Division has made important contributions in recent years. For example, the Division was the lead party responsible for producing a series of regional progress assessments on the Millennium Development Goals as part of the tripartite partnership project of the Asian Development Bank

⁴ See Commission resolution 64/1 of 30 April 2008 on the restructuring of the conference structure of the Commission.

⁵ See Commission resolution 50/5 of 13 April 1994 on the status of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific.

⁶ For the long-term strategy for the SIAP work programme, see E/ESCAP/CST/INF/6.

(ADB), ESCAP and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).⁷ It also coordinated and contributed to the publication of the report on progress towards the regional integration of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).⁸ In addition, it provided statistical assistance and analyses directly to the post-Nargis Joint Assessment prepared under the Tripartite Core Group established by the Government of Myanmar, ASEAN and the United Nations. During the recent restructuring of ESCAP, the Statistics Division was given the responsibility of coordinating the preparation of future regional reports on the Millennium Development Goals, and it is expected to contribute regularly to interdivisional and inter-agency analytical tasks, teams and products.

14. The current structure of the Division, with two sections addressing three areas of the work programme, reflects the existing resource constraints. Despite additional resources which were received recently, the Division remains small, with a total of 12 professional staff. Although the primary responsibility for statistical analysis rests with the Statistical Development and Analysis Section, support for analytical work will likely be pursued through a division-wide team approach. Likewise, some technical cooperation projects, especially if they are related to data dissemination, will likely be implemented by, or with strong support from, the Data Support and Dissemination Section.

B. Statistics development through technical cooperation: a proposed strategy

15. Statistics development has traditionally been a main component of the Statistics Division's work programme. However, with the increasing demand for better statistics and the persistent need to strengthen national statistical capacities, in recent years ESCAP has sought to become a more proactive and stronger regional player in promoting statistics development in the region by developing and implementing country-level needs-driven technical cooperation projects in priority areas in partnership with other international, regional, subregional and national players.

16. As a regional organization, ESCAP is well placed to support global initiatives by addressing regional perspectives and country needs, while focusing particularly on priority areas in which there is an urgent policy demand for better statistics and where international standards have yet to be fully developed or implemented. By doing this, ESCAP contributes to statistics development in the region and beyond.

17. What defines the potential of ESCAP to be a centre for promoting statistics development in the region? Inevitably, there are constraints. Since ESCAP is not a funding institution, its statistical capacity-building initiatives cannot be built upon dedicated transfers of substantial resources to countries; its statistics development programme is, therefore, small and its technical cooperation projects are dependent on extrabudgetary funding and could be hampered by the uncertainty of donor

⁷ See, for example, ADB/ESCAP/UNDP, *The Millennium Development Goals: Progress in Asia and the Pacific 2007*, Asia-Pacific MDG Study Series (Bangkok, 2007) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.II.F.31).

⁸ ESCAP, *Ten as One: Challenges and Opportunities for ASEAN Integration*, ESCAP Series on Inclusive & Sustainable Development, No. 1 (Bangkok, 2007).

priorities and the short budgetary cycle. It could also be argued that, since ESCAP does not have a presence in individual countries in the region, it has a limited capacity to support national strategies, institutional change, governing structures or other forms of organizational development which often have a strong bearing on sustainable capacity development.

1. Comparative advantages

18. Nevertheless, the current role and structure of ESCAP offer some unique comparative advantages for its statistics development programme, including the following:

(a) Broad mandate

19. The ESCAP statistics subprogramme has a broad mandate to promote statistical capacity-building in a wide range of areas (see Commission resolution 62/10). Unlike specialized agencies, ESCAP can pursue or support global, regional or subregional initiatives in different areas of statistics with great flexibility. Recent studies have suggested that broadly-defined statistical capacity-building programmes could be very beneficial and effective, as multiple needs could be addressed at the same time.⁹

(b) Regional forum for high-level strategic engagement

20. As an intergovernmental body, ESCAP has the authority to convene regional meetings and is respected for its impartiality. It can engage senior Government officials and managers of national statistical offices to advocate international standards, encourage strategic discussions on issues of region-wide importance and identify country needs and statistics development priorities at various regional forums, such as the annual Commission sessions and meetings of the Committee on Statistics and other Committees.

(c) Normative work on priority policy issues

21. As a regional commission, ESCAP is giving priority to strengthening normative work and promoting standards and policy analyses, with a special focus on transboundary issues and issues that are common to sub-groups of countries or emerging issues that have yet to become national political priorities. Given that the substantive work of ESCAP covers various policy areas, the statistics development programme could target statistical standards development in priority policy areas that are being promoted by ESCAP as a direct response to urgent and emerging national policy demands for better measurement and improved statistics.

22. The multidisciplinary nature of the ESCAP work programme allows the Statistics Division to work closely with other substantive divisions on joint activities, including advocacy both for the policy relevance of statistics development work and for the potential use of new statistics for national policy analyses and decision-making. The work of ESCAP in the area of disability policies and disability measurement and statistics is a good example.

⁹ See note 1.

(d) Addressing common country needs

23. Without country presence, ESCAP, indeed, could not be effective in operational, country-specific programming. Instead, it can focus on standards applicable to many countries and/or emerging policy issues of region-wide importance. Country experiences have shown that global initiatives are most effective in building sustainable statistical capacity where setting standards and providing tools are concerned.¹⁰

(e) Building on regional diversity

24. As ESCAP serves a region with huge disparities in national statistical capacity, it can actively promote good practices through knowledge-sharing and facilitate triangular cooperation¹¹ and South-South cooperation, particularly by establishing regional networks of national experts in various fields of statistical practice. At the same time, the Asia-Pacific region, with such large diversity, can often serve as the best testing ground for the development of better statistical measurements. In this connection, guidance for the ESCAP statistics development strategy is drawn from a recent policy decision (No. 2008/26) of the Secretary-General, in which he notes that South-South cooperation is a critical tool for achieving internationally agreed development goals and calls for the creation of a collaborative framework.

2. Guiding principles

25. This self-reflection on the comparative advantages of ESCAP, along with feedback from ESCAP member States and international and regional partners through various forums,¹² has helped the secretariat to formulate the following set of guiding principles that direct its statistics development programme. With this strategy, ESCAP is seeking to avoid ad hoc, stand-alone activities in favour of proactively pursuing a targeted, coherent technical cooperation programme.

(a) Promoting international standards while incorporating regional needs

26. The mission of the ESCAP statistics development programme is to facilitate the development of international standards and promote their implementation among countries in the Asia-Pacific region by creating links between national statistical systems and the international statistical community. Whenever necessary, the secretariat can help to bring a regional perspective and specific national needs into the process of standards development.

(b) Responding to policy needs and focusing on areas requiring urgent standards development

27. The statistics development programme recognizes the need to be extremely focused. Highest priority will, therefore, be given to areas where better statistics are needed to address urgent or

¹⁰ See note 1.

¹¹ Triangular cooperation refers to a type of South-South cooperation including two or more developing countries and one developed country.

¹² These forums included recent Commission sessions, annual meetings of the Committee on Poverty Reduction, the Second Forum for Asia/Pacific Statistics (APEX 2) (Daejeon, Republic of Korea, 21-22 September 2008) and various expert group meetings organized by the Statistics Division over the past two years, particularly the Expert Group Meeting on an ESCAP Regional Census Programme (Bangkok, 27-28 November 2006).

emerging national policy issues and where international statistical standards have yet to be fully developed. These are the areas where ESCAP can potentially make the greatest contribution to facilitating the development and implementation of international standards by highlighting the region's specific needs and perspectives.

(c) Synergy through partnership

28. In order to achieve a significant impact in statistics development, ESCAP needs to link up with global initiatives and seek synergy with other important global, regional and subregional partners. Its recent experiences offer convincing evidence that, while ESCAP is becoming more open and more capable of staying focused on strategic issues and pursuing the right mix of approaches, it is also being increasingly sought as a valuable regional partner in many ongoing initiatives. Such partnerships can facilitate coordination, create common ground and accelerate progress by combining resources and efforts in a particular statistical area. Partnerships with subregional organizations are particularly important given that regional diversity often requires a distinct subregional approach to measurement development and implementation. ESCAP will not only take the initiative to pursue targeted projects in partnership with others; it will also continue to support efforts by other major international partners to promote standards development and implementation in specific statistical areas in the Asia-Pacific region.

(d) An integrated approach that maximizes impact

29. To achieve significant results, an integrated approach should be used to implement technical cooperation projects whenever possible. They should combine advocacy and awareness-raising activities with the development of standard measurements and regional guidelines, targeted training, advisory services and the development of knowledge management tools. In particular, the projects should aim to maximize the potential to establish regional networks of national experts (regional resource pools) in given areas of statistics and, through them, facilitate triangular and South-South cooperation among countries in the region. Using this integrated approach, the statistics development programme of the secretariat is more likely to have a strong and sustainable impact.

(e) From project countries to broader region-wide involvement

30. Clearly, the regional statistics development initiatives pursued by ESCAP need to be aligned with national priorities, existing capacities and country interest in participating in the projects. While many of the project activities encourage region-wide country participation, during the pilot phase of some initiatives to develop standard measurements, ESCAP is seeking to start with a small number of countries, giving priority consideration to countries with special needs, and to use that experience to derive good practices and learn lessons that can subsequently be applied beyond the initial project countries.

31. It is important to recognize that, while statistical capacity-building activities generally target weak statistical systems, statistical standards development projects can and should involve more developed national statistical systems. These statistically more developed countries not only contribute to standards and methodological development; they can also offer good practices or direct technical assistance in this and many other statistical areas.

**C. The Statistics Division and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific:
complementary roles**

32. The Statistics Division and SIAP each have a distinct role to play in promoting national statistical capacity-building in the region. The Statistics Division focuses on technical cooperation, targeting areas with emerging international standards and methodologies, whereas SIAP provides and facilitates statistical training in the practical application of international standards and methodologies, focusing on areas where these standards are better developed.

33. This clear division of labour between the Statistics Division and SIAP also provides a strong basis for the training programme of SIAP and the statistical capacity-building activities of the Statistics Division to complement each other. Through coordination and collaboration, the two programmes together can achieve a greater combined impact. The recent integration of the SIAP work programme into the statistics subprogramme makes their joint programming feasible.

34. As shown in the table, the complementary roles of the Statistics Division and SIAP could be broadly defined according to specific capacity-building needs in various areas of statistics.

(a) *Areas of statistics with established international standards and methodologies.* In areas of statistics where international standards and methodologies are considered to be established, such as the main areas of national accounts or other economic statistics, SIAP has a primary role to play in providing regular training programmes to help increase national technical capacities to implement standards and apply good practices in data production, dissemination and use. These training programmes, such as the six-month or three-month Tokyo-based training courses, or subregional and in-country training activities target mostly junior and mid-level national statisticians. The Statistics Division, for its part, provides ad hoc advisory services in this area as requested by countries.

(b) *Areas of statistics with revised or newly developed standards and methodologies.* The Statistics Division and SIAP could best complement each other in areas where new standards have recently been introduced or revisions to existing standards have been issued (e.g. the revised System of National Accounts). The Statistics Division could engage senior experts and heads of agencies at regional forums to advocate the new standards, raise awareness and create a demand for training, while SIAP could develop new training materials and programmes (in partnership with other specialized agencies) to support the development of national technical capacities to implement the new standards.

(c) *Areas of statistics with emerging standards.* In statistical areas where there are urgent policy demands for better measurements and data but international standards have yet to be fully developed (e.g. disability statistics, gender statistics or metadata dissemination tools), the Statistics Division could take the lead role in supporting global initiatives of measurement development through targeted technical cooperation projects. Alongside the process of development, SIAP could start designing and delivering, on an experimental basis, specialized training programmes on the conceptual framework and methodological issues for interested countries, gradually expanding its regular programmes to include the new topic. The Statistics Division should explicitly include a training component to be jointly pursued with SIAP in its technical cooperation projects. The project funding allocated to the training activities could complement regular SIAP resources and enable the Institute to engage in new areas of work.

Table. Promoting statistics development in Asia and the Pacific: complementary roles of the ESCAP Statistics Division and SIAP

Area of statistics	Objective of capacity-building	Role of Statistics Division: technical cooperation	Role of SIAP: training
With established standards and methodologies	Increased national technical capacity to implement standards and apply good practices in data production, dissemination and use	Provide ad hoc advisory services; facilitate South-South cooperation	Regular training programmes, targeting primarily junior or mid-level statisticians
With revised or newly developed standards and methodologies	Increased awareness and capacity to implement	Regional forums: advocate standards and raise awareness and demand for training, targeting senior level statisticians, national experts and managers or heads of agencies	Develop and deliver new training or training of trainers programmes, targeting primarily mid- and senior-level statisticians
With urgent demands for data but standards not yet fully developed	Increased awareness and consensus; regional guidelines and recommendations	Technical cooperation projects: facilitate development of standards by linking global initiatives with regional and country needs and perspectives, targeting mid- to senior-level experts	Experimental training on emerging conceptual frameworks, targeting primarily mid- and senior-level statisticians and managers or heads of agencies

35. Pursued proactively, the complementary activities of the Statistics Division and SIAP could provide more effective assistance to national statistical capacity-building and strengthen the promotion of statistics development in the Asian and Pacific region.

II. PROMOTING STANDARDS AND BUILDING CAPACITY: RECENT EXPERIENCE

36. Over the past few years, the ESCAP Statistics Division has developed and started to implement a number of technical cooperation projects guided by both the ESCAP technical cooperation strategy¹³ and the proposed technical cooperation strategy in statistics development. This section provides a brief overview of some recent and ongoing projects. It highlights the strengths and potential of the proposed technical cooperation strategy for statistics development in the region.

A. Building capacity through population censuses

37. In late 2006, the Statistics Division proposed an ESCAP regional census programme as part of the ESCAP effort to promote national statistical capacity-building in the region (see E/ESCAP/CPR(3)/4). The proposal was developed with a clear recognition of the fundamental importance of population and housing censuses as a primary source of information for development planning and monitoring, especially for many developing countries that lack adequate administrative and vital registration systems. As conducting a census requires a wide range of skills and facilities, this initiative could also provide a unique opportunity for national statistical capacity-building with lasting impact. The 2010 round of population and housing censuses offers the single most important opportunity for improving the quality and availability of the data needed to monitor the Millennium Development Goals and targets, both directly by supplying relevant population counts and characteristics and indirectly by providing a more accurate sampling frame to guide other household surveys.

38. The proposed regional census programme is also a direct response to the request of the United Nations Statistical Commission for support for the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme. At its thirty-sixth session, the Statistical Commission requested that, in the process of implementing that Programme, the umbrella strategy should evolve around regional arrangements to the fullest possible extent, as those arrangements provided a flexible framework for developing regionally comparable statistics, sharing knowledge and resources, and taking into account regionally relevant issues.¹⁴

39. The formulation of the proposed programme was guided by the recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Population and Housing Censuses held in December 2004 and by the results of a 2005 information survey on country practices and plans concerning population and housing censuses among member States. The Expert Group Meeting on an ESCAP Regional Census Programme, which was held in Bangkok on 27 and 28 November 2006, reviewed the proposed programme and concluded in its report that the proposal was timely, responded to country needs in the region and contained the right mix of priorities and activities.

¹³ “UNESCAP technical cooperation strategy: Doing what matters...working better together...making a difference” (7 August 2003). Currently under review and revision.

¹⁴ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2005, Supplement No. 4 (E/ 2005/24)*, chap. IV, para. 12(b)(ii).

40. The proposed regional census programme focuses on three priority areas: (a) promoting the global principles and recommendations for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses; (b) supporting the use of censuses for measuring emerging issues, particularly migration and disability (i.e. building national disability or migration information systems around population censuses); and (c) facilitating the effective use of geographic information systems (GIS) and information technology (IT) for census operations and for data analyses and dissemination. The specific activities of the programme are to be designed and implemented based on close consultation and collaboration with national statistical agencies and in partnership and coordination with relevant subregional, regional and international organizations.

41. The proposed regional census programme is a direct application of the proposed technical cooperation strategy in statistics development and offers much promise. However, due to resource constraints, only two elements of the proposed programme are being implemented so far: improving disability statistics through censuses (as part of a broader project on disability measurement and statistics; see section C below) and facilitating the effective use of GIS and IT for censuses (in support of regional activities under the World Population and Housing Census Programme led by the United Nations Statistics Division).

42. In addition to the Subregional Workshop on Census Cartography and Management (Bangkok, 15-19 October 2007) and the Regional Workshop on Census Data Processing: Contemporary technologies for data capture, methodology and practice of data editing, documentation and archiving (Bangkok, 15-19 September 2008), which were jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division and ESCAP, the ESCAP Statistics Division conducted an information survey among member States in August of 2007 to identify country plans, experiences and skills, as well as the need for support in specific areas of GIS and IT implementation for censuses. It also organized the Expert Group Meeting on Effective Use of IT in Population Censuses, which was held in Bangkok from 10 to 12 December 2007, to share good practices among countries and identify priorities for regional actions.

43. These activities have helped to establish a regional network of national experts and to identify opportunities for South-South cooperation. The United Nations Statistics Division and the ESCAP Statistics Division are in the process of organizing study tours for some countries, preparing the upcoming regional workshop on census data dissemination and considering other possible follow-up activities.

B. Measuring the informal sector and informal employment

44. In many developing countries, a significant proportion of people are employed in the informal sector. While it is often assumed that poverty, for instance, is more prevalent among this group or that women are disproportionately represented in the informal sector, little objective and internationally comparable information is available about their living and working conditions, income, social

protection or contribution to the economy. Standard labour force and enterprise surveys usually capture, or separately identify, only a small fraction of those whose livelihood relies on working in the informal sector or in unprotected jobs. Without taking into account informal activities, estimates of female economic participation rates could be implausibly low and gross domestic product (GDP) significantly miscalculated. Data and measurement problems weaken the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes aimed at promoting gender equality, eliminating child labour, generating decent work for all and reducing poverty.

45. The Statistics Division developed the United Nations Development Account-funded project, Interregional Cooperation on the Measurement of the Informal Sector and Informal Employment, which it began implementing in 2007-2009.¹⁵ The project aims to improve the measurement of the informal sector and informal employment with specific objectives to: (a) increase the availability of data on the informal sector and informal employment; and (b) improve the analysis of these data to calculate the contribution of the informal sector to employment and to GDP.¹⁶ The project uses and adapts existing data collection methodologies in an effort to reduce costs and to allow the integration of informal sector and informal employment measurement into the regular data collection programmes of countries. The expected outcome of the project is to increase the number of countries which regularly collect and disseminate informal employment and informal sector data and integrate them into estimates of employment and national accounts.

46. The project is implemented by ESCAP (as the lead agency), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in partnership with the Delhi Group on Informal Sector Statistics, the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Statistics Division, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing and a number of national statistical offices. A steering committee, composed of all key partners, oversees project development and implementation and provides technical guidance and inputs.

47. Implemented through an integrated approach, the project has thus far focused on developing a unified survey data collection strategy, supporting pilot data collection in five countries and areas (Mongolia, the occupied Palestinian territories, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Saint Lucia), organizing regional training on data collection and dissemination¹⁷ and developing guidelines for estimating informal sector GDP and integrating informal sector production into national accounts.

48. While the project is still ongoing, it has already contributed to raising awareness of the importance of informal sector statistics in the region, developing a unifying approach, supporting

¹⁵ For details, see www.unescap.org/stat/isie/index.asp.

¹⁶ The measurement of the informal sector was noted as an important issue for Asia and the Pacific during the discussions at the First Forum for Asia/Pacific Statisticians (APEX 1), which was held in Bangkok on 3 and 4 February 2005.

¹⁷ Training events included the Workshop on Informal Employment and Informal Sector Data Collection: Strategy, Tools and Advocacy (Bangkok, 19-21 September 2007) and the Workshop on Informal Employment and Informal Sector Data Collection II: Evaluation, Processing and Utilization of Data from "1-2" Surveys (Bangkok, 14-16 May 2008).

national technical capacity development and providing insights for the revision of the 1993 System of National Accounts. Recognizing the importance of measuring the informal sector, the Asian Development Bank recently launched a similar project in three other countries using the same methodology.¹⁸ The ESCAP project has also provided a unique opportunity for strengthening interregional cooperation in statistics development.

C. Improving disability measurement and statistics

49. Despite recent efforts and progress, disability statistics in most countries in Asia and the Pacific remain severely underdeveloped. The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific¹⁹ and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities²⁰ call for improvements in national capacities for data collection and analysis to produce disaggregated, policy relevant disability statistics in the region and to ensure their availability. It is imperative to develop a unifying international approach to data collection through censuses and surveys. It is equally important to increase national political commitments and technical capacities to collect and disseminate better disability statistics for the formulation and evaluation of national disability policies and programmes.

50. Building on the outcome of the previous disability project conducted by ESCAP and the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2004-2006, the Statistics Division is implementing a United Nations Development Account-funded project, Improvement of Disability Measurement and Statistics in Support of the Biwako Millennium Framework and Regional Census Programme in 2007-2009 (see E/ESCAP/CPR(4)/6).²¹ The project supports advocacy for the emerging new approach to disability issues based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health and links the global measurement development initiative to regional policy programmes and to the need of countries to receive appropriate support.

51. The project promotes disability data collection through the 2010 round of population censuses based on the current global recommendations. It combines the development of standard survey instruments for disability data collection through pilot tests and results analyses with in-country advocacy workshops, targeted training, advisory services, the promotion of country-to-country cooperation and knowledge management. Going beyond the earlier project, the current project expands country coverage to include Central Asia.

52. The Statistics Division is implementing the project in close collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division, the Division for Social Policy and Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, WHO, ECE, the Budapest Initiative on Measurement of Health Status and selected national statistical offices

¹⁸ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) attends the project steering committee meetings. In addition, ADB and ESCAP collaborate to the extent possible on project activities in the region.

¹⁹ E/ESCAP/APDDP/4/Rev.1 (see also Commission resolution 59/3 of 4 September 2003).

²⁰ General Assembly resolution 61/106, annex I.

²¹ For updated information on this topic, see www.unescap.org/stat/disability/index.asp.

in the region and with the ESCAP Social Development Division, Pacific Operations Centre and SIAP. A steering committee oversees project design and implementation, while project activities are pursued through a task team led by national experts.

53. The project is progressing as planned. The Regional Workshop on Promoting Disability Data Collection through the 2010 Population and Housing Censuses (Bangkok, 8-10 April 2008) convened disability data producers and users from over 20 countries. It encouraged user-producer dialogue; advocated the approach to disability data collection based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health; provided training on the global guidelines and technical issues related to census data collection; and offered on-site training on advocacy skills to encourage joint advocacy efforts by disability data users and producers. A CD-ROM version of the *Training Manual on Disability Statistics*²²—jointly developed by the ESCAP Statistics Division, SIAP and WHO—was launched at the workshop.

54. In close cooperation with the Washington Group on Disability Statistics and other partners, the project task team is focusing on developing survey-based standard question sets and designing pilot test protocols and study plans. Six countries will participate in pilot testing the survey question sets and in post-pilot test analyses. Other countries in the region will participate in the subsequent regional workshops and training, including regional and subregional training courses organized by SIAP.²³ The national disability experts connected through the activities of the previous and current projects have started to form a regional network for advocacy, knowledge-sharing and South-South cooperation.

55. The design of this disability project reflects the proposed ESCAP technical cooperation strategy. At the annual Commission sessions and other regional meetings, national and international partners have expressed strong support for the project and provided positive feedback regarding its model approach, which should be replicated in other areas of statistics development and in other regions.²⁴

D. Facilitating microdata documentation

56. Household surveys and various censuses are conducted through national statistical systems at significant cost. The results are routinely tabulated and published. The collected data have great value beyond the published results, especially for researchers. Many modern statistical analysis techniques, including regression analysis and statistical matching, and various methods for the detailed profiling of specific phenomena cannot be applied using the data available in published tabulations; they require microdata, i.e. unit-level records of individuals or individual households. Microdata-based analyses are essential for policy research and design and for assessing progress, including progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and targets.

²² United Nations publication, Sales No. E.08.II.F.16, available at www.unescap.org/Stat/disability/manual/index.asp.

²³ For example, the Second Regional Course on Disability and Health Statistics, to be held in Daejeon, Republic of Korea, from 22 to 26 September 2008.

²⁴ See, for example, *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2008, Supplement No. 19* (E/2008/39-E/ESCAP/64/39), paras. 66, 319-320.

57. However, survey or census data in many developing countries are rarely properly documented and archived, nor can they be easily accessed by researchers. Not only are the costly survey or census data severely underutilized for policy and planning purposes; they are also insufficiently evaluated through transparent processes to be able to help improve future data collection and dissemination efforts.

58. The Statistics Division implemented the joint project on improving access to survey microdata in Asia and the Pacific, which was funded by the World Bank and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS21). The project is part of the pilot regional implementation of the global Accelerated Data Programme, which was established as a priority action under the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics to help developing countries produce statistical data that are relevant for policy design, monitoring and evaluation by making better use of existing data and aligning survey programmes and statistical outputs to priority data needs.

59. Through the project, ESCAP raised awareness of the importance of microdata documentation, preservation and dissemination and provided hands-on technical assistance to seven countries (Bangladesh, Fiji, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, the Philippines and Viet Nam) through advisory missions and in-country training workshops for staff of national statistical offices who are directly involved in survey and census documentation and dissemination. Three regional workshops, covering a wider number of countries, were held in Bangkok to provide training on: the use of the metadata toolkit (Training on documentation and archiving for census and survey microdata, 12-16 November 2007); managing disclosure risk and anonymization tools for microdata dissemination (Workshop on Managing Disclosure Risk and Anonymization Tools for Microdata Dissemination, 28-30 May 2008); and sharing project lessons learned (Workshop on Census and Survey Microdata Dissemination: Benefits and Challenges, 18-20 June 2008).

60. A 2007 online survey of country survey data collection activities since 1990 was completed by 30 Governments in the ESCAP region. It provided a basis for specifying and implementing project activities. By the end of June 2008, when the pilot phase of the project came to an end, a total of 119 census and survey microdata sets had been documented.²⁵

61. Through the project, participating countries have made survey and census microdata available for the benefit of researchers and policy analysts. Many other countries, upon learning about the project, expressed a strong interest in learning more about the tools or receiving technical support for their possible application. Some also inquired about the possibility of project expansion to allow their participation.

²⁵ A regional survey and census metadata archive has been developed under the project on the internal ESCAP network. It is not yet publicly available.

62. With the aim of continuing implementation of the Accelerated Data Programme in the region, building on pilot phase results, the World Bank and PARIS21 are currently exploring alternative approaches to strengthening direct support to countries.

E. Supporting strategic planning for statistical development

63. In recent years, the Statistics Division has also engaged in other joint technical cooperation projects, including a PARIS21/ESCAP project on promoting national strategies for the development of statistics in developing countries in the region, in support of the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics.²⁶ The project brought together senior national statisticians, policymakers, bilateral donors and international and regional partners at a subregional workshop and three subregional high-level forums on strategic planning in statistics in 2005 and 2006.²⁷ The forums raised awareness among countries of the benefits and challenges of strategically moving national statistical systems forward, encouraged discussions on the internationally recognized approach of national strategies for the development of statistics and offered opportunities to reflect on achievements, identify constraints and consider solutions. They also provided a platform for the exchange of ideas and helped to increase understanding among countries, between donors and recipients, and among donors. Based on the follow-up priorities agreed upon by the participants, the project partners are developing a follow-up project to further promote national strategies for the development of statistics in the region through country-level support and South-South cooperation.

64. While most of the ESCAP statistical capacity-building initiatives influence the organizational development of national statistical systems indirectly, the project on promoting national strategies for the development of statistics directly targets organizational changes in how national statistical development is linked to national development strategies, the needs of users, national resource allocation and donor support.

F. Improving data for the monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals

65. The Division has also promoted the improvement of statistics for the assessment of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals—an area in which the Division's role as a prominent user of regional data on the Millennium Development Goals and its role in promoting statistical development are intricately linked.

66. ESCAP uses data on the Millennium Development Goals to carry out regional progress assessments and policy analyses and it has visibly advocated statistical capacity-building through its regional statistics development programme. ESCAP has supported projects on improving statistical literacy in selected countries in the region (i.e. Cambodia, Pakistan and Viet Nam) and regional

²⁶ The Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics proposed that all low-income developing countries should aim to implement—with donor support—national strategies for statistical development by 2006.

²⁷ The workshop was held in South Asia (Colombo, 13-15 December 2005). The forums were held in South-East Asia (Bangkok, 6-8 June 2006), Central Asia (Bishkek, 17-19 May 2006) and East and North-East Asia (Ulaanbaatar, 9-11 October 2006).

workshops and conferences on the production, dissemination and innovative use of data on the Millennium Development Goals.²⁸ The Statistics Division is currently participating in an interregional project to assess the availability and consistency of data in national and international data series through country studies and to identify ways to improve coordination between national and international statistical systems.²⁹

67. ESCAP has also been working closely with ADB and UNDP under a tripartite Millennium Development Goal partnership to explore ways to help improve national statistical capacities to produce better statistics for monitoring progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals, including data from administrative sources and disaggregated statistics for inequality analyses.

III. DEFINING FUTURE DIRECTIONS

68. With the re-establishment of the Committee on Statistics, ESCAP is looking into the future directions of its statistics development programme and considering ways to strengthen technical cooperation activities for greater, long-lasting impact in the region. At this juncture, it is critical to draw attention to the following issues, which will determine the “what” and “how” aspects of the statistics development programme that can be realistically pursued.

A. Balancing between expansion and focus

69. In recent years, ESCAP has been striving to become a stronger player in supporting statistics development in the region. Its proposed strategy for technical cooperation in statistics reflects its commitment to strengthening its internal capacity so as to pursue a more focused and targeted work programme by making optimal use of available resources. Many policy-relevant and technically pressing statistical development issues have the potential to become priority areas within the broad mandate of the statistics development programme. For example, ESCAP has been approached by potential partners to consider developing joint work in the following areas: economic statistics (including the System of National Accounts), gender statistics, health statistics, environmental statistics, measuring the progress of societies and the use of administrative records to produce population estimates and other Millennium Development Goal indicators. Inevitably, the need to expand and the need to focus must be balanced. In order to be able to plan ahead, it is extremely important to decide in which areas ESCAP should aim to concentrate its efforts to achieve greater long-term impact and in which areas it should further specialize under the current broad division of labour among the various international and regional players.

²⁸ These included the Workshop on Statistics for Monitoring the Achievement of the MDGs in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok from 31 July to 2 August 2006 and jointly organized by SIAP and the ESCAP Statistics Division with funding from UNDP and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the 2007 International Conference on the Millennium Development Goals Statistics, held in Manila from 1 to 3 October and jointly organized by the ESCAP Statistics Division, ADB, the United Nations Statistics Division and the National Statistical Coordination Board (Philippines).

²⁹ A regional workshop on the coordination of reporting mechanisms and data discrepancies in monitoring the Millennium Development Goals, jointly organized with the United Nations Statistics Division, is scheduled to be held in Bangkok from 10 to 12 December 2008.

B. Balancing between a broad supportive role and core functions

70. Meanwhile, as the regional arm of the United Nations Secretariat, ESCAP continues to support the regional implementation of global initiatives, including those led by other entities within the United Nations statistical system. This often takes the form of ad hoc joint regional meetings and workshops and the delivery of other products. With its existing capacity, ESCAP faces the challenge of balancing its broad supportive role with its core work programme in statistics development. Clearly, better coordination with partners through, among other things, joint long-term planning, would enable better delivery.

C. Balancing support for different areas of statistics

71. The statistics development programme of ESCAP is also facing the challenge of how to balance its support for capacity-building in diverse areas of statistics. As the recent technical cooperation experience of ESCAP indicates, the statistics development programme has focused more on social statistics. However, the need for support to improve statistics in economics or other areas, such as data derived from administrative and vital registration records, remains pressing in this region. It is well known that capacity-building support has been more available to social statistics and to household surveys than to growing priority areas in agriculture, finance and economic measurement. Although economic statistics are generally more likely to be supported by Governments and to be more timely than other statistics, the methods used to produce economic data series are outdated in many developing countries of the region.³⁰

72. Donor support to statistical capacity-building has often concentrated on household surveys, while there has been little support for the regular collection of administrative information—an important source of data for many Millennium Development Goal indicators. This task was left to Government ministries. The uncertain and often poor quality of the administrative data has, in turn, induced efforts by major international organizations over the past two decades to develop and offer household surveys. Some regional organizations, academic institutions and aid agencies, such as ADB and the Australian Agency for International Development, have invested in projects that support the assessment of administrative data or the development of new methodologies to improve the use of existing vital statistics. These agencies have expressed interest in working with ESCAP to broaden activities in the Asia-Pacific region.

73. It is also evident that the ESCAP statistics development programme has been moving beyond statistics production to include support for national capacities in data dissemination and use (e.g. the microdata documentation project)—initiatives which are often well received by countries, given the need for support. How to achieve a strategic balance in the support for statistics development in diverse areas of statistics while meeting country needs remains a priority consideration for ESCAP.

³⁰ See note 1.

D. Engaging national statistical offices and other entities

74. Official statistics are produced and used by a national system composed of national statistical offices and several other organizations (e.g. sectoral ministries). While national statistical offices play a central coordinating role in some countries, in many others there is often no effective strategy to coordinate the national system. This could pose coordination difficulties for entities such as ESCAP, especially when technical cooperation projects target statistical areas beyond the primary responsibility of national statistical offices.

75. In carrying out recent project activities, ESCAP has continued to work closely with national statistical offices, while also involving experts from other statistical offices (e.g. ministries of health, in the case of the disability project). Given the varying institutional structures of national statistical systems among countries in the region and recognizing the central role of national statistical offices in many countries, the secretariat is seeking to streamline the process so as to adequately engage country participation in projects while supporting the in-country coordination of national statistical systems.

E. Partnership with regional and subregional statistical organizations

76. The proposed strategy for statistics development fully recognizes the importance of partnership and coordination with regional and subregional organizations. The secretariat has benefited from the support of many of these organizations recently while pursuing various technical cooperation projects. However, stronger partnerships and a more systematic approach are required to maximize synergy and minimize the duplication of efforts. Perhaps an informal mechanism could be established among the agencies for the regular exchange of information, the provision of mutual support and, where necessary, the joint programming of projects and activities. For this purpose, a side event has been scheduled, to be held in conjunction with the first session of the Committee on Statistics, in order to facilitate the discussion of an action plan among key regional and subregional partners.

F. Coordination with United Nations agencies at the country level

77. Capacity development is a high priority of the United Nations system. In its 2005 triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, the General Assembly recognized that capacity development and ownership of national development strategies were essential for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and called upon all of the organizations of the system to further enhance their support for national capacity development in the context of South-South cooperation.³¹ Capacity development within a single United Nations country framework has become a major part of the United Nations reform aimed at achieving “Delivering as one”. The Working Group on Non-resident Agencies of the United Nations Development Group³² set out a menu of options for non-resident agencies, such as ESCAP, to engage

³¹ See General Assembly resolution 59/250.

³² The United Nations Development Group was created by the Secretary-General in 1997 to improve the effectiveness of United Nations development at the country level. It brings together the operational agencies working on development and is chaired by the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). UNDP also acts as the secretariat of the Group.

in coordinated United Nations capacity development initiatives at the national level, ranging from participating fully in joint programming with United Nations country teams to improving communications and liaisons with the lead United Nations agency in each country.³³

78. In implementing various projects in recent years, the ESCAP secretariat has recognized the important role of United Nations country teams in directly supporting national statistics development and has made deliberate efforts to establish direct contact with them in project countries in order to coordinate activities and seek substantive inputs and support.³⁴ For example, representatives from United Nations country teams in Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Sri Lanka and Thailand participated in the subregional high-level forums on national strategies for the development of statistics held in their respective countries and shared their experience in supporting national planning for statistical development. Nevertheless, it remains a challenge for ESCAP to achieve congruence with the country programme priorities of United Nations country teams and to improve coordination with them when developing and implementing its own technical cooperation programme.

G. Sustainability

79. The secretariat has been successful recently in obtaining funding from the United Nations Development Account for some of its interregional technical cooperation projects (e.g. the informal sector measurement project) or for follow-up projects (e.g. the disability statistics project). The tripartite ADB/ESCAP/UNDP partnership also provides some resources for activities related to the Millennium Development Goals.

80. Although joint projects pursued in strong partnership with other major organizations may help to increase funding prospects, the statistics development programme faces the constraints of funding uncertainty and a short budgetary cycle, which threaten the sustainability and impact of its programme, making it even more pressing for ESCAP to develop a focused statistics development work programme.

H. Evaluation of impact

81. Regarding its role in statistics development in the region, the secretariat is of the view that the process and methods for evaluating the impact of its technical cooperation programme need to be significantly improved. As is the case with other capacity-building programmes, when evaluating projects, the focus has been on substantive results (outputs) rather than on the outcome, particularly the impact statistics have had on policies.

³³ United Nations Development Group Working Group on Non-resident Agencies, "Enhancing the participation of non-resident agencies in UN country-level development activities: A preliminary inventory of current tools and mechanisms, obstacles and opportunities" (New York, March 2006).

³⁴ United Nations country teams usually provide logistical support for ESCAP project activities, for example, by facilitating travel arrangements for country participants.

82. ESCAP fully recognizes the importance of project monitoring and evaluation and has been developing a new monitoring and evaluation framework jointly with other regional commissions to guide the design, management and evaluation of technical cooperation programmes. This framework will help to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of the statistics development programme.

83. The Statistics Division proposed new indicators to measure its work programme in its strategic framework for the biennium 2010-2011, including the use of periodic follow-up questionnaires among participants and project countries to determine the programme's impact. The proposal signifies an important step away from the old approach of focusing on changes in data availability. So far, however, project-based monitoring and evaluation remain weak; although they are often included as a project activity under a separate budget line, there is a lack of built-in processes, procedures and criteria to ensure proper monitoring and sufficient funding for adequate evaluation.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

84. The Committee may wish to review the proposed ESCAP strategy for technical cooperation in statistics development and the recent technical cooperation activities pursued by the secretariat. It may also wish to provide guidance and advice on priorities for and suitable approaches to future activities to help strengthen the statistics development programme and its impact. In particular, the Committee may wish to:

(a) Provide guidance to the secretariat on the strategic focus of its statistics development programme and the priority areas of work based on recognized regional and country needs;

(b) Advise the secretariat on the special need to balance support for economic statistics and other areas of statistics, particularly those derived from administrative records, and for data production and data dissemination technology and good practices, as well as providing guidance on the distinct role that ESCAP could play in each area;

(c) Review the secretariat's recent work and provide advice on the need to strengthen its engagement with national statistical systems in designing and implementing its technical cooperation programme for statistics development;

(d) Express its views on coordination and cooperation among regional and subregional organizations in future statistical capacity-building initiatives and suggest a possible mechanism for these actions;

(e) Express its views on the secretariat's statistics development programme and its expectations concerning the programme's future role in the region.

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