

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

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Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda*

**Review of progress by partners with respect to the
collective vision and framework for action: Partners
for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific****Report on the Partners for Statistics Development in
Asia-Pacific****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific was established in December 2010 to strengthen collaboration among statistics development partners operating in the region. Since the last report of the Partners, to the Committee on Statistics at its fourth session, in 2014, it has met on two occasions. The last meeting of the Partners took place alongside the fifth session of the Committee on Statistics, in Bangkok in December 2016.

The present document revisits the accomplishments of the Partners and introduces another coordination mechanism, the Thematic Working Group on Statistics. This group was established in 2016 and functions within the United Nations Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism.

The Committee is invited to consider the abolishment of the partnership, on the grounds that the Thematic Working Group on Statistics is better suited to delivering effective coordination of statistics development at the international, regional and national levels with a view to navigating policy with data to leave no one behind.

I. Introduction

1. The Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific is a regional network of international, regional and subregional organizations and bilateral donors. It was established following a recommendation by the Statistical Commission to strengthen collaboration among development partners operating in Asia and the Pacific. At its seventh meeting, in March 2015, the Partners re-elected the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as Co-Chairs for the period 2015–2016. The Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) provides secretariat services for the Partners.

* ESCAP/CST/2018/L.1/Rev.1.

2. The partnership has met ten times since its inception. The meetings were held in conjunction with meetings of the Committee on Statistics, the Statistical Commission and the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. The last meeting of the Partners took place alongside the fifth session of the Committee on Statistics, in Bangkok in December 2016.

II. Establishment

3. The Statistical Commission, at its fortieth session, requested ESCAP to establish an informal mechanism for donor coordination for statistical development in the region.¹

4. To this end, the secretariat invited development partners with an interest and role in statistics development in the region to discuss the formation of a coordination mechanism. At the first meeting of the Partners for Statistical Development in Asia-Pacific, which was held in Bangkok on 14 December 2010, international, regional and subregional organizations and bilateral donors as well as representatives of the Governments of Australia, Japan and the Russian Federation agreed to establish the Partners with the purpose of improving the combined impact of capacity-building activities through enhanced coordination, synergy and complementarity among partners.²

5. The Partners agreed to align its work with the decisions and priorities outlined by the Committee on Statistics and to coordinate its work with the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities at the global level. It was further agreed that the Partners would report on the progress made towards meeting its strategic objectives to the Committee on Statistics.

III. Main function of the partnership: information-sharing

6. The Partners decided to function as a network for sharing information and galvanizing collaboration on existing initiatives, rather than identifying a separate programme. Recognizing that information-sharing is a first step towards the improvement of cooperation and collaboration, the Partners decided to use the *Partner Report on Support to Statistics* as its primary information-sharing tool.

7. Over the course of its existence, the partnership has coordinated approaches to supporting member States in building statistical capacity in Asia and the Pacific, as a contribution to the implementation of the regional initiatives of the Committee on Statistics, and has recommended areas of work for future collaboration to address priorities identified by the Committee on Statistics.

IV. Activities of the Partners, 2010–2018

8. The work of the Partners during the period has mainly included information-sharing to improve the coordination of capacity-building activities. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Partners have focused particularly on how to improve the ongoing coordination of capacity-building for statistics development with a view to achieving the 2030 Agenda, in the light of the increased data requirements for monitoring

¹ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2009, Supplement No. 4 (E/2009/24)*, chap. I, sect. B, decision 40/112, subpara. (f).

² See <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/accesub/2011docs-17th/SA-2011-12-ESCAP.pdf>.

the Sustainable Development Goals. This process has involved the sharing of partners' priorities and strategies for statistical capacity-building in the region.

9. Many partners are now active members in various regional initiatives, such as the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics, the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific.

10. During its work, partners have co-organized or supported multiple important meetings, workshops and events. Recently, they have supported the Asia-Pacific Economic Statistics Week, the expert consultation workshop entitled "Sex-disaggregated data for the Sustainable Development Goals indicators in Asia and the Pacific: what and how?", the Subregional Workshop on Environment Statistics for South-East Asian Countries, the Regional Meeting on Disability Measurement and Statistics in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, and the first Regional Meeting on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics for the Pacific Islands.

11. Partners have also supported important capacity-building efforts across the region, such as a comprehensive capacity-building strategy for the statistical system of Myanmar. In July 2012, development partners – ADB, ESCAP, the European Union, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, UNFPA and the United Nations country team Millennium Development Goals monitoring and evaluation group – conducted a preliminary consultation with representatives of several ministries in Myanmar to initiate discussion on identifying and prioritizing statistical capacity-building needs. On the basis of the consultation, partners worked collectively to develop a proposal for a process to formulate the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics in Myanmar.

12. At the sixth meeting of the Partners, the power of regional initiatives to push global action from the national level through the coordination of activities facilitated jointly by the Committee and the Partners was highlighted. In the example of civil registration and vital statistics, action taken over the years by Governments and agencies in Asia and the Pacific was having a ripple effect globally, resulting in loud calls for improved alignment of mandates and programmes among relevant agencies.

13. Despite visible achievements in information-sharing, support provided at multiple events and capacity-building efforts, secretariat services to the Partners have been resource-intensive. Further, the financial implications of gathering partners have required the secretariat to organize meetings in conjunction with meetings of the Committee on Statistics, the Statistical Commission and the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. The irregular meetings with varying participation, determined by the events in conjunction with which they were held, have limited the effectiveness and impacts of the Partners.

V. New developments

14. Since the last meeting of the Partners, in 2016, new regional efforts have emerged to strengthen those in support of statistical development in Asia and the Pacific. Discussions among partners in the region have also reflected the need to consolidate efforts and find the most practical and effective mechanism to deliver coordinated support to member States, maintain flexibility and rapid-response ability to meet emerging demands in the region,

and reinforce existing regional initiatives in a coordinated manner. These discussions have taken place within the two primary United Nations system coordination mechanisms for the region, namely the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism and the United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific:

(a) The Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism, established by ESCAP, provides the primary vehicle for strengthening policy coherence within the United Nations system and promoting cooperation and collaboration among United Nations entities and their development partners in addressing regional development issues. It also provides an important means of articulating regional concerns and priorities at the global level and acting as a bridge between global, regional and national agendas;

(b) The main objective of the United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific is to deliver more coherent, effective and efficient support to countries seeking to attain internationally agreed development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Main work modalities include United Nations development assistance frameworks and the “Delivering as one” initiative. The United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific is convened by the United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

15. Under the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism, thematic working groups have been established. The main functions undertaken by the thematic working groups are the following: the production of regional analyses and knowledge products for use in policy and advocacy work at the global, regional and country levels; information-sharing and mapping of programmes and activities across the region; joint programming, including support to regional sectoral coordination mechanisms and the organization of regional meetings; the mobilization of partners, including at the country level, to develop regional analytical, normative and advocacy products, as appropriate, and to support countries in their use.

16. The Thematic Working Group on Statistics was established in 2016 as one element of a general revamp of the thematic working groups to be fit for purpose for achieving the 2030 Agenda. The core members of the Thematic Working Group on Statistics include United Nations and related entities working at the regional level on monitoring and capacity development with respect to data and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals.³ UNFPA and ESCAP co-chair and provide secretariat services for the Thematic Working Group.

17. The role of the Thematic Working Group is to enhance synergy and complementarity among programmes and activities of United Nations agencies in the region for monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals and statistical development and to address the statistical and data-related concerns of the other thematic working groups of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism.

18. The objectives of Thematic Working Group include: (a) supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through effective and efficient support for monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals at the country level and a sustainable approach to statistical capacity development of national statistical

³ See annex (reproduced from www.unaprcm.org/sites/default/files/twgattachment/Terms%20of%20Reference%20-%20TWG%20Statistics.pdf).

systems and stakeholders of the national data ecosystem; and (b) providing a coordinated strategy, process and mechanisms for statistics and data input for regional input to the global processes, and for regional implementation of global mandates, including follow-up and review of progress with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals. Activities include the following:

(a) The Thematic Working Group is working closely with the United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific to ensure that its activities lead to enhanced collaboration at the country level. In May 2018, the Thematic Working Group, jointly with United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific, delivered a pilot data literacy workshop for resident coordinators and other representatives of United Nations country teams to ensure that the country teams have sufficient awareness of issues related to statistics development to function as the link and coordination hub between Governments and international agencies for the provision of sustainable and appropriate support for statistics development at the country level;

(b) The Thematic Working Group is currently developing rules of engagement for United Nations actors in the Asia-Pacific region, subregions and country teams to align themselves with the objective of achieving collective results at the national level in support of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and led by national priorities and needs. The rules of engagement are being developed with the country team of Viet Nam to make use of the successful approaches taken there with a view to delivering as one;

(c) The 2018 workplan for the Thematic Working Group also includes the development of draft common tools for the provision of data and statistics support for voluntary national reviews and longer-term plans to strengthen the ability of national statistical systems to provide data and statistics for the 2030 Agenda. The work has been initiated by sharing existing and emerging tools such as the ESCAP diagnostic tool (developed for environment statistics prioritization and planning), review tool (developed for system-wide assessments of national statistical systems) and policy-data integration tool (the EPIC tool, developed under the guidance of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics) for inter-agency review and consultation.

19. In summary, the objectives of the Thematic Working Group are well aligned with the initial ambitions of the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific. Moreover, within its relatively short existence, the Thematic Working Group has managed to go beyond information-sharing, directing its efforts squarely towards impact at the country level. This outreach and impact is enabled by its placement within the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism and its linkages to the United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific, which gives it access to high-level United Nations representatives at the country and regional levels.

VI. Conclusion and requests for the Committee

20. The Committee is invited to consider the following proposal by the secretariat:

(a) To abolish the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific in its current form;

(b) To express confidence in the Thematic Working Group on Statistics (i) to assume the responsibilities and functions of the Partners, and (ii) to extend the impact of the Partners to deliver effective coordination of statistics development at the national level with a view to strengthening

national statistical systems and navigating policy with data to leave no one behind;

(c) To encourage special sessions of the Thematic Working Group on Statistics during sessions of the Committee on Statistics, the Statistical Commission or the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities that include a broader range of partners;

(d) To request the Thematic Working Group on Statistics to provide a progress report at the next session of the Committee on Statistics.

Annex

Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism

Terms of reference*

Thematic Working Group on Statistics

August 2016

Objective

1. To support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development through effective and efficient support for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring at the country level and a sustainable approach to statistical capacity development of national statistical systems and stakeholders of the national data ecosystem.
2. To provide a coordinated strategy, process and mechanisms for statistics and data inputs for regional inputs to the global processes, and for regional implementation of global mandates, including follow-up and review of Sustainable Development Goal progress.

Functions

3. The main functions that may be undertaken by the thematic working groups are regional analyses and knowledge products that can be used for policy and advocacy work at the global, regional and country levels; information-sharing and mapping of programmes and activities across the region; joint programming, including support to regional sectoral coordination mechanisms and organization of regional meetings; mobilize partners, including at the country level, in the development of and support to countries for utilization of regional analytical, normative and advocacy products as appropriate.¹
4. The role of the Thematic Working Group on Statistics is to enhance synergy and complementarity among programmes and activities of United Nations agencies in the region around Sustainable Development Goal monitoring and statistical development and to address the statistics and data concerns of the other thematic working groups of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism. Its core functions will be:
 - (a) To give support to regional analyses and creation of knowledge products, including through a shared regional statistical database and expert reviews to strengthen the data and statistics used for regional analyses and publications on the Sustainable Development Goals;
 - (b) To undertake information-sharing and mapping of programmes and activities across the region on identifying statistical gaps, developing and applying statistical capacity-building tools and statistical capacity-building programmes at both the regional and national levels;

* Reproduced from www.unaprem.org/sites/default/files/twgattachment/Terms%20of%20Reference%20-%20TWG%20Statistics.pdf.

¹ See Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism chapeau text for Thematic Working Group terms of reference, 26 April 2016.

(c) To provide a forum for developing a strategic regional approach to statistical capacity-building and advocating for statistics and data strengthening for Sustainable Development Goal implementation;

(d) To support ongoing United Nations country-level efforts to strengthen national statistical capacity such as through organization of regional meetings and collaborative training courses/workshops, and support to partners in the utilization of regional analytical, normative and advocacy products, as appropriate;

(e) To give particular priority to promoting a United Nations system-wide effort to promote the use of statistics to identify exclusions and inequalities to ensure that no one is left behind in the region's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Organization

5. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the United Nations Population Fund will serve as Co-Chairs, and act as the joint secretariat to the Thematic Working Group on Statistics. The Co-Chairs will chair the Thematic Working Group meetings in rotation. The Co-Chairs can make decisions on behalf of the Thematic Working Group if required, within the parameters of these terms of reference, summary records of previous meetings and the Thematic Working Group's annual workplan.

6. The core members/participants of the Thematic Working Group include United Nations and related entities working at the regional level on monitoring and capacity development on data and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals. The Thematic Working Group may decide to open participation on a case-by-case basis to representatives of other concerned entities such as members' Asia-Pacific subregional offices, subregional intergovernmental bodies, central statistical offices and bilateral agencies.

7. Each member agency will designate a focal point and an alternate at the highest level possible to facilitate collaboration. The cost of participation will be met by each participating agency. Member agencies may send observers to Thematic Working Group meetings if they wish. Observers for the meetings may also be invited on a case-by-case basis by the Co-Chairs. The focal points represent their agency and are responsible for providing updates on their environment, related activities and plans. The focal point is also responsible for keeping their colleagues in the respective agencies informed on the activities of the Thematic Working Group.

8. The Thematic Working Group will meet as deemed necessary, but at least two times a year. The agenda of each meeting will be circulated to members in advance by the Thematic Working Group's secretariat, including relevant background documents. A summary record of each meeting, reflecting recommended actions and outcomes, will be prepared by the secretariat, endorsed by the members and submitted to the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism's secretariat for centralized records.

9. The Thematic Working Group will prepare an annual workplan with responsibilities, success indicators and projected timelines for activities, at the first quarter of each calendar year. The Co-Chairs will report on implementation of planned activities at the meetings of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism as required.

10. The Thematic Working Group could decide to establish mechanisms such as working groups and task forces, drawing on its members, to focus on longer-term areas of shared work as well as time-bound specific tasks. These mechanisms will report on their work, including recommendations for consideration where appropriate, to the Thematic Working Group on a regular basis. Reports may also be made available to the Co-Chairs between Thematic Working Group meetings as required. Cost of participation will be met by each participating agency.

Monitoring and evaluation

11. The Thematic Working Group will regularly assess its organization and functioning, including the mandates, relevance and responsibilities of its task forces and working groups. The Thematic Working Group will prepare an annual workplan at the beginning of each year with the identification of a specific agenda for discussion at each meeting. Implementation of the annual workplan will be monitored through meetings and reporting. Towards this end, the Thematic Working Group will produce a summary record of each meeting (prepared by the agency chairing the meeting) which will be circulated to Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism members. A detailed assessment of the Thematic Working Group's relevance and effectiveness will be conducted after two years.
