

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Statistics

Fourth session

Bangkok, 25-27 March 2015

Item 7 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Reports brought to the attention of the Committee: Bureau

Report on the activities of the Bureau since the third session of the Committee**

Summary

The present report provides an overview of the work carried out by the Bureau since the third session of the Committee. The Committee may wish to take note of the decisions and recommendations of the report.

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* E/ESCAP/CST(4)/L.1.

** The present report is being issued without formal editing.

I. Introduction

1. The Committee on Statistics at its third session, in December 2012,¹ elected the Bureau to perform its functions over the intersessional period until the fourth session of the Committee. The elected members of the Bureau were: Ms. Carmelita Ericta of the Philippines (Chair); Mr. Gerelt-Od Ganbaatar of Mongolia; Mr. Ki-Jong Woo of the Republic of Korea and Mr. Sefuiva Reupena Muagututi'a of Samoa (Vice-chairs); Ms. Aishath Shahuda of the Maldives (Member); and Mr. Geoff Bascand of New Zealand (Rapporteur).

2. During its tenure Ms. Lisa Bersales replaced Ms. Carmelita Ericta as the Chair and the member representing the Philippines; Mr. Mendsaikhan Sonomtseren replaced Mr. Gerelt-Od Ganbaatar as the member representing Mongolia; Mr. Hyungsoo Park replaced Mr. Ki-Jong Woo as the member representing the Republic of Korea; and Ms. Teresa Dickinson replaced Mr. Geoff Bascand as the member representing New Zealand.

II. Method of work

3. The Bureau met twice during its tenure. The first meeting was held prior to the forty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission in New York on 24 February 2013. The following members of the Bureau attended the meeting: Mr Geoff Bascand (Chair), Mr Gerelt-Od Ganbaatar, Ms Insook Jeong (on behalf of Mr Ki-Jong Woo) and Mr Sefuiva Reupena Muagututi'a. Mr Simil Johnson of Vanuatu attended the meeting as an observer, and Ms. Haishan Fu; Ms Margarita Guerrero and Mr Yanhong Zhang of the secretariat assisted the Bureau at the meeting. The focus of the meeting agenda was the Bureau programme of work and follow-up to the decisions and recommendations of the third Committee session. These included the review of the terms of reference of the working and steering groups and the preparation of resolutions to be submitted to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) at its sixty-ninth session.

4. The second meeting of the Bureau was held back-to-back with the forty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission in New York on 4 March 2014. The following members of the Bureau attended the meeting: Ms Lina Castro (Chair on behalf of Ms Carmelita Ericta), Son Young-tae (on behalf of Mr. Hyungsoo Park), Ms Aishath Shahuda, Mr. Mendsaikhan Sonomtseren (in place of Mr. Gerelt-Od Ganbaatar), Mr Gary Dunnet (in place of Mr. Geoff Bascand) and Mr Sefuiva Reupena Muagututi'a. Ms Rikke Munk Hansen and Mr Yanhong Zhang of the secretariat assisted the Bureau at the meeting. The focus of the meeting's agenda included the progress of the work of the various steering and working groups in implementation of the overarching strategic goal of the Committee and the preparations for the fourth Committee session.

5. In addition to these two meetings, the Bureau discussed its work programme and provided guidance on the work of the secretariat through teleconferencing and electronic mail.

¹ E/ESCAP/CST(3)/17.

III. Follow-up on the decisions and recommendations of the Committee at its third session

A. ESCAP resolutions

6. In accordance with agenda item 9 of the third session of the Committee on “consideration of possible draft resolutions for submission to the Commission at its sixty-ninth session”, the Bureau at its first meeting discussed the preparation and submission of two draft resolutions on: (a) the core set of population and social statistics; and (b) implementing the outcome of the High-level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific.

7. The Bureau expressed its appreciation to Australia, Indonesia and Samoa for a draft resolution on the core set of population and social statistics and agreed that it be circulated immediately among Committee members for consultation. The Bureau also agreed that the draft resolution on CRVS be circulated among Committee members and to the participants of the High-Level Meeting on the improvement of CRVS in Asia and the Pacific that took place from 10 to 11 December 2012, encouraging them to communicate their support of the draft resolution through appropriate channels of their governments.

8. The Commission at its sixty-ninth session adopted two resolutions regarding statistics development: resolution 69/15² of 1 May 2013 on implementing the outcome of the High-level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific; and resolution 69/16 of 1 May 2013 on a core set of population and social statistics to guide national capacity development in Asia and the Pacific.³

B. Social statistics

9. In accordance with Committee recommendation 3/1 and decision 3/3 on a core set of population and social statistics, the Bureau at its first meeting endorsed the revised terms of reference of the Technical Advisory Group on Population and Social Statistics, maintaining its existing composition and leadership.

C. Civil registration and vital statistics

10. In accordance with Committee recommendation 3/2 and decision 3/4 on the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the Bureau at its first meeting, in February 2013, suggested that the secretariat circulate to all Committee members the draft Commission resolution proposed by the Philippines and Australia on implementing the outcomes of the High-level Meeting on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific (that would become Commission resolution 69/15), which called for, inter alia, the secretariat to establish a regional steering group and to convene a ministerial conference in 2014. The secretariat completed this exercise and included guidance to Committee members on how their Governments could co-sponsor the resolution before or during the Commission session in May 2013.

² See Commission resolution 69/15.

³ See Commission resolution 69/16.

11. With the mandate provided by Commission resolution 69/15, the Bureau approved in June 2013 the terms of reference for the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, and the Chair co-signed with the Executive Secretary a call for nominations to member States. In total, 71 nominations were received from 36 member States and associate members, as well as 5 nominations from development partners. During the Bureau's teleconference in September 2013, it decided on 19 Government members of the Regional Steering Group, representing a balance of subregions and of the civil registration, health and statistics sectors, and to accept all five nominations from development partners. In accordance with the terms of reference, the Chair of the Committee and a representative of the Brisbane Accord Group, which coordinates the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan, were automatically accorded membership, bringing the total membership of the Regional Steering Group to 26.

12. Throughout 2014, the Bureau continued to provide strategic guidance for the preparations towards the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which was held in Bangkok from 24 to 28 November 2014. The Chair of the Committee delivered opening remarks at the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Ministerial Conference, which took place on 28 and 29 August 2014.

D. Economic statistics

13. In accordance with Committee decision 3/2 on the implementation Plan for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the Bureau at its first meeting reviewed the revised draft terms of reference of the Steering Group. The Bureau agreed to extend the functions of the Steering Group to include resource mobilization to support the Regional Implementation Plan. The Bureau also decided that the Steering Group should number between six and 10 members comprising one to two representatives from the NSOs in each sub-region of ESCAP; one member representing a Central Bank; one representing a Ministry of Finance; and two members representing donors and other development partners. The Bureau asked the secretariat to revise the terms of reference for the Steering Group to reflect these decisions.

14. Based on the recommendations of the Bureau, the Terms of Reference for the Steering Group were revised and a call for nominations was issued in May 2013 by the Chair of the Committee on Statistics. The Bureau agreed, at its teleconference held in August 2013, that the large number of nominations received from member States pointed to a strong interest in the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics and decided to retain all nominations, bringing the size of the Steering Group to 26 members. In line with the Bureau's earlier recommendation and to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of the Steering Group, a Coordination Committee comprising eight Steering Group members was subsequently established by the Bureau, reflecting both the geographical and developmental variability in the region and including the participation of three international organizations. The Bureau requested further revision of the Terms of Reference of the Steering Group in order to reflect the establishment and the functions of the Coordination Committee and asked the Steering Group to identify members from central banks and ministries of finance. To date, two central bank representatives have joined the Steering Group as members.

15. At its second meeting, the Bureau noted in conjunction with agenda item 3(d) of the forty-fifth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, the “Report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts”, the importance of strengthening national capacity to produce the basic underlying statistics. The Bureau further noted that plans to scale up global efforts on the implementation of SNA2008 should take advantage of existing regional mechanisms, such as the Committee on Statistics and capacity development programmes being implemented under its guidance, including the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics.

16. At its second meeting the Bureau also noted in considering the agenda for the fourth session of the Committee, that 2014 is a benchmark assessment year for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics.

E. Agricultural statistics

17. In accordance with Committee decision 3/6 on the Regional Action Plan for the Global Strategy on Agricultural and Rural Statistics (RAP), the Bureau at its first meeting noted that the RAP was to be considered for endorsement by the Global Steering Committee at its 5th meeting, scheduled for 26 February 2013. The Bureau also noted that the overall budget from hard commitments of the RAP had been adjusted downward, including the training component which the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) is coordinating.

18. At its second session the Bureau noted that the Committee at its fourth session would be invited to review progress made by the Steering Group for Agricultural Statistics in implementing the RAP.

F. Coordination of statistical training in the region

19. In accordance with Committee decision 3/8 on the coordination of statistical training in Asia and the Pacific, the Bureau at its first meeting reviewed the draft terms of reference of the Advisory Group for the Regional Coordination of Statistical Training. The Bureau concluded that the Group should facilitate information sharing and coordination among statistical training institutions in the region, including among the institutions represented on the Group, in support of the key regional statistics development programmes pursued by the Committee. Based on this decision, the Bureau agreed that the scope of work and membership of the Group should be re-defined and that revised terms of reference should be submitted to the Bureau for further consideration.

20. At the teleconference meeting of 26 September, 2013, the Bureau approved the functions and goals specified in revised terms of reference for the Advisory Group for the Regional Coordination of Statistical Training, and renamed it as “The Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific”. Prior to the first meeting of the Network from 22 to 24 April 2014 in Chiba, Japan, the Bureau endorsed via electronic consultation recommendations from SIAP for its Chair.

G. Modernization of statistical production and services

21. In accordance with Committee recommendation 2/1 on the strategic direction of the Committee on Statistics and decision 3/5, the Bureau at its first meeting reviewed the draft terms of reference of the Strategic Advisory Body for the Modernization of Statistical Production and Services in Asia

and the Pacific (SAB-AP). The Bureau highlighted the importance for the Asian-Pacific region of using SAB-AP as a link to participate in the global network on modernization which has so far been quite active at the UNECE level. The Bureau agreed that Australia and the Republic of Korea, which are already part of the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Statistical Production and Services (HLG), could play an important role in linking Asia and the Pacific to other initiatives.

22. The Bureau approved the draft terms of reference for the SAB-AP. The Bureau also suggested that the SAB-AP should decide its programme of work and produce a proposal for the establishment of an expert community to raise awareness, facilitate regional dialogues and support national efforts.

23. At its second meeting, the Bureau noted that agenda item 3 (j) of the forty-fifth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission on “Big Data and modernization of statistical systems” included a proposal to establish a new global working group. The Bureau noted that this group should work though and with existing bodies such as SAB-AP as well as HLG.

24. In an e-mail consultation in June 2013, the Bureau accepted all seven nominations as members of the SAB-AP (Australia, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Republic of Korea Samoa and Viet Nam) and appointed the member from Australia as Chair. Further, in an e-mail consultation in January 2015 the Bureau also supported the addition of representatives from Indonesia and Singapore as a member of SAB-AP.

H. Environment statistics

25. In accordance with Committee decision 3/7 on environment statistics, the Bureau at its first meeting took note of agenda item 3(e) of the forty-fourth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission “Revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES)”. The Bureau emphasized the importance of reviewing the revised FDES and its implications for a regional strategy for environment statistics.

26. At the teleconference meeting convened on 4 February, 2014, the Bureau decided that given the lack of information about countries’ current capacity within the National Statistical System (NSS) to produce and disseminate environment statistics, the wide range of policy needs in the region, the number of existing environment statistics capacity initiatives and the need to develop coordination of these initiatives at the national level – that it would be premature to begin development of a regional strategy for improving environment statistics for consideration at the fourth session of the Committee on Statistics. In place of a regional strategy, the Bureau requested that the secretariat prepare a report to the Committee of potential strategic priorities for the region, in light of the endorsement by the Statistics Commission of the revised FDES as well as other relevant developments at the global level such as adoption of an international standard for environmental-economic accounting in 2012.

27. In its second meeting the Bureau emphasized in conjunction with agenda item 3(e) of the forty-fifth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission “Report of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting”, the importance of advocacy among policy makers. The Bureau also supported the inclusion of “environment statistics” as an agenda in the fourth session of the Committee under “regional initiatives”.

IV. Preparations for the fourth session of the Committee

28. At its second meeting, the Bureau agreed to hold the fourth session of the Committee in Bangkok, Thailand, from the 17 to 19 December 2014. The Bureau subsequently agreed via electronic consultation to the secretariat's proposal that the fourth session be postponed and take place from the 25 to 27 March, 2015. This decision was made in recognition of the unique and timely opportunity presented by the fourth session for heads of national statistical systems to influence regional action in preparation for implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. To assist the Committee, the Bureau further agreed that an expert group meeting should be convened the week of 8 December to draw conclusions about the implications for statistics development in the region of the post-2015 development agenda, and to put forward recommendations to the Committee for its consideration and decision at its fourth session.

29. The Bureau also noted in its second session the need for and importance of developing disaster statistics and welcomed the initiative taken by the ESCAP Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction to work with the Committee on Statistics to develop a core set on disaster statistics. On this basis, the Bureau agreed to the inclusion of disaster statistics under "regional initiatives" on the agenda for the fourth session of the Committee.

30. At the teleconference meeting convened on 5 June, 2014, the Bureau noted that the agenda item on 'gender statistics' has no group overseeing its direction, and that its mandates stem from the global level. The Bureau further noted that the United Nations Statistical Commission has put in place a global programme to improve gender statistics including a minimum set of gender indicators and that a regional set of indicators has been developed to reflect the specific context of Asia and the Pacific, and to guide the mainstreaming of gender in the production and use of statistics. The Bureau committed to encourage active participation from their countries during consultations about the regional core gender indicators, and to encourage similarly active participation from countries in their respective subregions.

V. Other work

A. Informing the Statistical Commission of decisions and developments

31. At its first meeting, the Bureau agreed that the secretariat should, on behalf of the Committee, inform the forty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission of the recent decisions of the Committee on Statistics as well as developments in the region under relevant agenda items.

32. At the teleconference convened on 2 August 2013, the Bureau considered the content and process for developing the regional report to the Statistical Commission, which for the forty-fifth session in 2014, would be provided by Asia and the Pacific. The Bureau decided that the report should not just be about statistical progress in the region, but also raise strategic issues such as the post-2015 development agenda and inter-regional collaboration. The Bureau further decided to prepare a video of best practices and innovations provided by the NSOs in the region to be shown on conference monitors throughout the session.

33. At the teleconference convened on 2 August, 2013, the Bureau also discussed how consultations within the region could benefit the work of the Statistical Commission's Friends of the Chair Group (FOC) on Broader Measures of Progress. The Bureau decided to encourage Australia, India and the Philippines, the members from Asia and the Pacific of FOC, to exchange views on the terms of reference for FOC; to initiate consultations in the Bureau member's subregions; and that the 2013 SIAP Management Seminar could include discussion on broader measurements of progress in the context of the theme "Statistics, Rio+20 & the post-2015 development agenda".

34. At its second meeting the Bureau considered the report on "Regional statistical development" considered at its teleconference in August 2013 and submitted for consideration under item 3(n) of the agenda for the forty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission. The Bureau noted that their delegations would make statements supporting the call contained in the report to include a goal on statistics in the post-2015 development agenda. Samoa also notified the Bureau that a delegation from the Pacific would make a similar statement on behalf of the sub-region.

B. Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific

35. At its second meeting, the Bureau was informed that the 10th session of the Governing Council of Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, would be held from 15 to 16 December in Bangkok, prior to the fourth session of the Committee on Statistics. Following the decision to postpone the fourth session, the Bureau was informed via electronic consultation that the 10th session would be held from the 11 to 12 December following the expert group meeting on the post-2015 development agenda.

VI. Meetings of the Bureau since the third session of the Committee on Statistics

Date	Venue
Sunday, 24 February, 2013	New York City
Friday, 2 August, 2013	Teleconference
Thursday, 26 September, 2013	Teleconference
Tuesday, 4 February, 2014	Teleconference
Tuesday, 4 March 2014	New York City
Thursday, 5 June, 2014	Teleconference
Friday 16 January, 2015	Teleconference