REVIEW OF GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE SUPPORTING THE WORK OF THE ESCAP COMMITTEE ON STATISTICS

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BACKGROUND

1. At its 8th session, the Committee on Statistics requested "that its Bureau shall, with the support of the secretariat, conduct a review of the groups and communities of practice supporting the Committee's work and propose recommendations to that end for consideration by the Committee to streamline, consolidate and improve those groups and communities to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose. This could include moving towards less formal collaboration mechanisms which may be better suited to the complex world in which national statistical offices now operate.[1]"

2. Since the first session of the Committee on Statistics held in 2009[2], the Committee has established a number of groups and communities of practices[3] to reflect the evolving needs of the statistical community in Asia and the Pacific. The current five groups and communities of practices, supporting the Committee on Statistics are:

   i) **Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific** established in 2009 to oversee the implementation of the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific from 2010 to 2020. The ESCAP Committee on Statistics at its sixth session in 2018 advised for the Programme to be extended to 2030 and for its objectives to be aligned with *Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community* [2] *and the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind* [3]. The Steering Group at its 8th and 9th meetings in 2019 and 2020 adjusted and extended the programme accordingly with the most recent terms of reference entering into force on 1 January 2021.

   ii) **Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics**, established in 2017, following a decision by the Committee on Statistics of ESCAP, at its fifth session in 2016 to oversee the implementation of the Regional Strategy to achieve its vision, "*the countries of Asia and the Pacific have the capacity to produce, disseminate, and use the core set of population and social statistics by 2030.*"

[1] https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/CST_2022_8_E.pdf
[2] https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/CST1-10E_0_ENG.pdf
[3] This paper uses the term "groups" to refer collectively to the groups and communities of practice as listed.

iii) **Data Integration Community of Practice** (DI-CoP) established in 2020 following a decision by the Committee on Statistics of ESCAP at its sixth session in 2018 to provide a virtual collaboration space for sharing knowledge and experience on data integration as well as for developing the Asia–Pacific guidelines to data integration for official statistics[4] which were completed in 2021.

iv) **Technical Working Group on Disaster Related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific** (TWG) established in 2019 to support the advancement of disaster-related statistics in the Asia and Pacific region with a strategic focus on capacity, standards and governance.

v) **Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific**, established in September 2013, with a mandate to act as a facilitator of information-sharing and of coordination among statistical training institutes in the region. At the eighth meeting of the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific *"It was agreed to recommend to the Committee on Statistics that (a) network activities would continue on a needs' basis through short-term groups with clear objectives; (b) the Committee would consider proposals for establishing such ad-hoc groups, if any, at each of its future sessions as and when needed."* Based on the recommendation of the Network meeting held on 13 December 2022, the Sub-Group on gender statistics is submitting annual reports of its activities to the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific Governing Council.

3. In addition to these groups, in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCAP started a series of Asia-Pacific Stats Cafés[5] to facilitate the exchange of practices and advice between United Nations entities and national statistical systems. These webinars bring together an audience of participants exploring a wide range of topics aligned to country priorities and requests for assistance.

REVIEW OF THE GROUPS

4. This review is being led by the Bureau, supported by the secretariat and was initiated to:
    a. Identify lessons learned on the operation, composition, substantive focus, and results of existing groups of the Committee; and

    b. Propose modalities and criteria for establishing future Committee groups and determine their focus and modality of operation, based on the identified lessons.

[4] https://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/asia-pacific-guidelines-data-integration-official-statistics
[5] https://www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics/stats-cafe

5. The review considered to what extent the current groups were relevant to the collective vision and framework for action[6] and the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind[7] as well as considering the allocation of resources for the operation of the different groups from a member State and from a secretariat perspective. Additionally, the extent to which these groups complement each other in achieving Committee objectives and implementing decisions was also considered alongside any potential overlap with global groups.

6. The review involved desk research and polls and surveys conducted with members of the individual groups as well as discussions with secretariat staff. Presentations on the initial findings of the review and emerging recommendations were discussed and agreed at a Bureau meeting held in Bangkok on 7 September 2023.

LESSONS LEARNED

7. The review highlighted a number of lessons learned on the operation, composition, focus and results of the existing groups of the Committee:

   i) Formal groups, such as the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, can work well where there are additional financial resources which help with their functioning and the reporting, however, funding is not always renewed, and when discontinued, such as is the case for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics, it is challenging for the group to continue operations with focus and direction, while still being burdened with the responsibility of reporting;
   ii) Informal groups, such as the Data Integration Community of Practice and the Technical Working Group on Disaster Related Statistics, are able to respond quickly to the rapidly changing context, unlike formal groups;
   iii) Online webinars, such as the Asia-Pacific Stats Cafes and the Data Integration Community of Practice online meetings, provide a good mechanism to share information and experiences and are able to respond quickly to emerging issues;
   iv) Communities of Practice, work well when they are inclusive and allow for a wide exchange of knowledge and experiences;
   v) With an increase in the range of multi-domain topics such as data governance, environment statistics and big data, there is an increasing overlap between the existing groups. In recognition of this the most recent Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics meetings have been held jointly;

[6] E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1.
[7] ESCAP/75/4/Add.1.1.

vi) Member States are keen to engage with global groups to ensure there is a strong Asia and Pacific voice and would prefer that regional groups do not duplicate global groups with similar mandates, such as is the case with the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific which has a very similar mandate to the more recently created Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training (GIST);

vii) The Secretariat has limited resources and as such can only support a small number of groups.

8. Based on the review findings, the Bureau discussed the emerging recommendations on the Committee structure and modalities at a Bureau meeting held on 7th September 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. The Bureau recommends that the current Committee structure, with its five groups and communities of practice, is replaced with a new structure as shown in Figure 1.

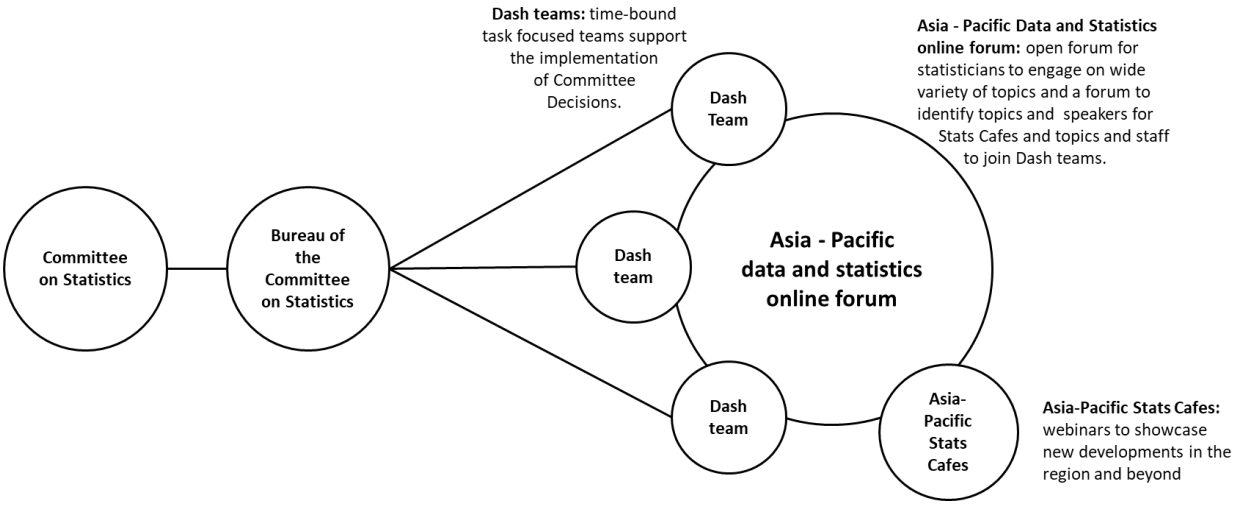

Figure 1: New Committee structure

10. The recommendations are as follows:

a. **To abolish the existing groups and communities of practice** supporting the Committee, that is the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, the Data Integration Community of Practice, the Technical Working Group on Disaster Related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific.

b. To create a new **online forum for statisticians across Asia-Pacific to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experience and advice** between United Nations entities and national statistical systems, building on the success of the existing Data

Integration Community of Practice, the Technical Working Group (TWG) on Disaster Related statistics and the Asia-Pacific Stats Cafes. The forum would provide an online place where people can communicate, share information and collaborate on official statistics. It would also be used to identify key topics and staff to contribute to Asia-Pacific Stats Cafes and to Dash teams. One integrated online platform would enable more collaboration and knowledge sharing, especially on multi-domain topics as well as enabling efficient Secretariat support.

c. **To establish Dash teams** to support the implementation of decisions taken by the Committee on Statistics. Dash teams would be formed to address a particular task and would be time-bound to the completion of the task. Dash teams would be convened through the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics and would report to the Bureau. It is anticipated that there will be two to three Dash teams operating at a given time. A Dash team might be set up to support the implementation of a new or revised methodology such as the implementation of the 2025 System of National Accounts or to develop new regional guidance or conduct technical research and development, such as the recent work to develop a data governance framework and to compile a compendium of country data governance practices. Engagement with the statisticians working across domains would be situational. Members of Dash teams will be sought from the online forum as well as through the Chief Statisticians of respective NSOs who would be asked to nominate staff for Dash teams, noting that they would not be expected to nominate staff for all Dash teams. Dash teams would be open and inclusive as well as providing opportunities for staff working in national statistical offices to contribute to regional work.

NEXT STEPS

11. As part of the review process there will be two formal rounds of consultations with member States, led by the Bureau.

12. The recommendations, adjusted to reflect the outcome of this consultation, will be submitted for consideration by the ESCAP Committee at its ninth session due to be held 11 to 13 December 2024.

Annex 1: Draft Terms of Reference for Asia-Pacific Dash Teams

Key functions

1. The objective of Dash teams are to provide time bound task focused teams which can support the implementation of decisions taken by the ESCAP Committee on Statistics in support of their work on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the document entitled Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community (E/ESCAP/CST(5) Rev.1) and the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind (ESCAP/CST/2018/7).
2. Dash teams will be created for a specified timeframe, usually between 3 to 12 months, with a maximum timeframe of two years, to achieve a specific output such as:
    a. Development of recommendations or technical guidance/ training materials;
    b. Review and improvements, for technical guidelines; and
    c. Analysis or development of new tools.
3. When a Dash team is set up a specific set of terms of reference will be developed and agreed by the Bureau.

Methods of work

4. The Dash teams shall conduct their business through electronic means only.

Membership, roles and responsibilities

5. Dash teams will be set up for a specific task with their own set of terms of reference. Experts will be sought from national statistical offices and other organizations contributing to the national statistical system. Dash team members will be recruited through two mechanisms:
    a. Through an open call for experts posted in the online forum; and
    b. Through an open call to heads of national statistical offices to nominate members to join a specific Dash team.
6. Membership should be voluntary and open to all Asia-Pacific countries. Each Dash team will include a range of countries and where relevant other organizations which have expressed an interest in working on a specific issue.

Reporting

7. Dash teams will report orally to the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics annually. Any tools, recommendation or guideline developed by Dash teams will be submitted to the Committee on Statistics for endorsement.

Secretariat

8. The Statistics Division of ESCAP shall serve as secretariat for the Dash teams. The secretariat shall support the Dash teams in carrying out their functions.

Review of the terms of refence

9. The Bureau may review the Terms of Reference for the Dash teams as a whole and for each individual Dash team as the need arises, to ensure that they carry out their functions efficiently and effectively based on their mandate.

Sunset clause

10. Each Dash team will be created for a specified time frame, usually for a maximum of two years. Unless the Committee on Statistics decides otherwise, Dash teams will expire by the end of 2030.