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Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Progress made since the eighth session of the Committee on Statistics: progress made in implementing the decisions taken by the Committee at its eighth session

Progress made in implementing the decisions taken by the Committee on Statistics at its eighth session

Note by the secretariat

Summary

In the present document, the secretariat provides a summary of the progress made in implementing the decisions taken by the Committee on Statistics at its eighth session, including decision 5, in which the Committee decided that the bureau should 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.

At its ninth session, the Committee may wish to provide the secretariat with guidance on the organization of the future work of the Committee. It may also wish to adopt the draft decision on streamlining the Committee's structure contained in the present document.

Furthermore, the Committee may wish to provide comments and guidance on the implementation of all the decisions taken by the Committee at its eighth session.

* ESCAP/CST(9)/1.

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I. Introduction

1. At its eighth session, held in Bangkok and online from 23 to 25 August 2022, the Committee on Statistics adopted six decisions. The present document contains information on the activities that have been carried out to implement those decisions.

II. Status of implementation of the decisions adopted by the Committee at its eighth session

A. Decision 1

2. By its decision 1, the Committee endorsed the revised terms of reference of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, pursuant to which the frequency of the meetings of the Regional Steering Group was increased to annually.

3. A joint meeting of the Regional Steering Group and the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was held online from 31 October to 2 November 2023.[1]

4. At that joint meeting, the two Steering Groups recognized the need for innovative approaches to navigating the complex array of statistical domains to fulfil their mandates. It was suggested that the focus be shifted to specific technical topics through specialized sprint sessions. To ensure broad participation and relevance, those sprint sessions would be open to members and associate members and individual experts.

5. Recognizing the need to share information on various technical topics, the Steering Groups also suggested the creation of knowledge-sharing platforms on topics prioritized by the Committee. In this regard, the Committee may wish to take note of its decision 5, by which the Committee decided that its bureau should conduct a review of the groups and communities of practice supporting the work of the Committee and propose recommendations, including on moving towards less formal collaboration mechanisms. Such mechanisms could include knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

6. A second joint meeting of the two Steering Groups is to be held online on 15 October 2024. At that meeting, participants will be expected to focus on sharing information on national innovations that increase the agility with which economic and social statistics are produced and disseminated.

B. Decision 2

7. By its decision 2, the Committee decided that the technical working group on disaster-related statistics in Asia and the Pacific should continue its work.

8. Pursuant to that decision and in accordance with the strategic plan of the technical working group, six meetings were held between October 2022 and September 2023.[2] The technical working group conducted a review of the Disaster-related Statistics Framework and how it was being applied in

[1] See www.unescap.org/events/2023/joint-meeting-steering-groups-escap-committee-statistics.

[2] The reports on each meeting of the technical working group are available at www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics/twg-meetings.

10 countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Türkiye. The review highlighted the challenges and potential solutions for data producers and compilers in strengthening statistics related to disasters. The national experiences collected through the review will serve as a regional input to the work of the global Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics, which operates under the purview of the Statistical Commission to develop a global common framework for disaster-related statistics.

C. Decision 3

9. By its decision 3, the Committee decided to feature data governance in its future work with an emphasis on sharing country experiences and facilitating the provision of technical assistance. It requested the bureau to propose, in consultation with the secretariat, draft recommendations to that end for consideration by the Committee, while bearing in mind the need to stay within existing regular budget resources.

10. Data governance was the focus of the seventeenth Management Seminar for Heads of National Statistical Offices in Asia and the Pacific, held in Chiba, Japan, on 14 and 15 December 2022 under the theme "Managing evolving data ecosystems: governance, stewardship and the changing role of national statistical offices".

11. Data governance was also the focus of an expert group meeting held from 5 to 7 September 2023. At that meeting, experts from member States and regional and global institutions discussed a draft data governance framework and a draft compendium of country data governance practices. The framework and compendium of country practices were presented, discussed and refined at: four Asia-Pacific Stats Cafés, held on 22 and 29 January and on 5 and 12 February 2024;[3] at two thematic conferences, one held in December 2023 for South-East and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and one held in June 2024 for the Pacific islands;[4] and at a workshop on modernizing statistical legislation held in May 2024.

12. The data governance framework was the topic of a Stats Brief published in March 2024, which has since been accompanied by a set of country profiles available online.[5] The profiles are dynamic and will be updated by the secretariat as new information becomes available.

D. Decision 4

13. By its decision 4, the Committee decided to feature the production and use of complementary progress measures in its future work with an emphasis on climate change-related statistics. It requested the bureau to propose, in consultation with the secretariat, draft recommendations to that end for consideration by the Committee, while bearing in mind the need to stay within existing regular budget resources.

14. The importance of improved climate change-related statistics was recognized at the seventy-ninth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. In its resolution 79/1 on accelerating

[3] See www.unescap.org/events/2024/asia-pacific-stats-cafe-series-data-governance-across-asia-and-pacific.

[4] See https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/thematic-conferences/.

[5] See www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics/data-governance.

climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development, in fact, the Commission encouraged all its members and associate members to strengthen regional and subregional cooperation for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, including by taking a whole-of-government approach to strengthening the collection and use of climate change-related statistics.

15. At the aforementioned joint meeting of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics and the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, it was recognized that economic statistics feature prominently in the conceptual frameworks for environment and disaster-related statistics through specific accounts (such as economic loss and disaster risk reduction expenditures), which are of relevance to climate change-related statistics. Recognizing the synergy between economic and climate change statistics in the context of efforts to measure progress beyond gross domestic product, the Steering Groups recommended the creation of a knowledge platform to share experiences on developing climate change-related statistics and implementing the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting. The Committee may wish to take note of its decision 5, by which the Committee decided that its bureau should conduct a review of the groups and communities of practices supporting the work of the Committee and propose recommendations, including on moving towards less formal collaboration mechanisms. As already mentioned, such mechanisms could include knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

16. The third expert forum for producers and users of disaster-related statistics, which was held in Bangkok and online from 5 to 7 June 2023, brought together 274 country experts and representatives of United Nations agencies, other international organizations and academic institutions to discuss experiences in the production and utilization of disaster-related statistics to guide risk-informed development. The participants stressed the growing frequency and severity of climate change-induced disasters, highlighted the intrinsic links and the need for consistency between statistics related to disasters and to climate change, and identified the priorities of countries in terms of capacity development and technical support. Furthermore, the participants discussed research topics and shared insights for developing the global common framework for disaster-related statistics.

17. Since the eighth session of the Committee, the secretariat has provided technical support to help countries to improve climate change-related statistics. Specifically, it has provided support on forest accounting and climate change-related statistics (Fiji); population exposure to disasters (Nepal); nature-based solutions and carbon accounting (Maldives); land and forest accounting and priority climate change-related statistics (Bhutan); and statistics on gender and climate change (Fiji, Indonesia and Philippines).

18. In 2024, the secretariat secured funding from the seventeenth tranche of the United Nations Development Account to continue its efforts to strengthen climate change-related statistics in the Asia-Pacific region during the period 2025–2028.

E. Decision 5

19. By its decision 5, the Committee decided that its bureau should, 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, as appropriate, that may be better suited to the complex world in which national statistical offices now operate, while bearing in mind the lead role played by such offices. Particular attention should be paid to arrangements and mechanisms to support statistical offices in their efforts to meet the growing demand for climate change-related statistics and to navigate complex data governance choices.

20. The bureau, with support from the secretariat, conducted the above-mentioned review, which involved desk research, polls and surveys of members of the groups and communities under review, discussions with secretariat staff and two rounds of consultations with representatives of member States and development partners. The consultation process also included two Asia-Pacific Stats Cafés to gather feedback and facilitate dialogue between national statistical offices and others involved in the development of statistics.

21. As part of the review, consideration was given to: (a) the extent to which the groups and communities supporting the Committee's work were relevant to 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"[6] and the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind;[7] (b) the resources allocated for the operation of the groups and communities; and (c) the extent to which the groups and communities complemented each other in achieving the Committee's objectives and in implementing its decisions, as well as any overlap with global groups.

22. The review generated lessons learned on the operation, composition, focus and results of the groups and communities, including the following:

(a) Steering groups such as the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics and the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific can function effectively when they oversee a programme or a strategy that is under active implementation. This typically requires extrabudgetary resources for operational activities combined with regular budget resources in the form of secretariat staff to coordinate monitoring and reporting tasks and organize meetings. However, it has been challenging to mobilize the resources needed to ensure the continuity of the operational work of the two Steering Groups, which has in turn made it difficult for the Steering Groups to maintain focus and ensure progression towards the ambitions agreed to by the Committee;

(b) Specialized groups such as the Asia-Pacific Data Integration Community of Practice and the technical working group on disaster-related statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which focus on developing technical knowledge and expertise in specific areas through online collaboration and knowledge-sharing, offer effective and low-cost platforms for technical discussions on specific topics and can quickly adapt to changing circumstances;

(c) Online webinars such as those in the Asia-Pacific Stats Café series are useful for sharing information and experiences, quickly responding to emerging issues and attracting diverse audiences;

[6] E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1.

[7] ESCAP/75/4/Add.1.

(d) Communities of practice work well when they allow for the exchange of knowledge and experiences on a broad range of topics and when they include a wide range of stakeholders;

(e) As the range of topics expands to cover multiple domains and as issues become increasingly cross-cutting (see, for example, data governance, data integration, disaster- and climate change-related statistics and big data), there is an increasing overlap in the work done by existing groups and communities. This is one reason why the most recent meeting of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics and the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was held jointly;

(f) Member States are eager to engage with global groups to ensure strong Asia-Pacific representation and prefer that regional groups avoid duplicating the mandates of global groups. For example, the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific has a mandate similar to the more recently established Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training;

(g) As the secretariat has limited resources, it can only support a small number of groups and communities of practice.

23. The review resulted in a recommendation that the groups and communities of practice supporting the Committee, that is the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the Asia-Pacific 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, be replaced with more flexible, time-bound task teams. Furthermore, the good practices, lessons and knowledge gained from the existing groups and communities of practice should be carried over and integrated into the new teams to ensure continuity while expanding the number of statistics-related topics of importance in the Asia-Pacific region.

24. Another recommendation arising from the review was that the secretariat establish an online forum for statisticians across Asia and Pacific to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experience and advice among national statistical systems and development partners, building on the success of the Asia-Pacific Data Integration Community of Practice, the technical working group on disaster-related statistics and the Asia-Pacific Stats Cafés. The forum would enable participants to engage in discussions, share information, ask questions and interact with others with similar interests in areas related to official statistics.

25. The consultations showed that there was strong support for replacing the groups and communities of practice with more flexible task teams to support the implementation of the decisions taken by the Committee. Each team would be created for a specified time, typically between 3 and 12 months and for no longer than two years. Each team would focus on achieving a specific objective, such as the creation of a new tool, the formulation of technical recommendations or the development of training materials. Each team would have specific terms of reference, which would be agreed to by the Committee’s bureau and be developed with support from the secretariat. The teams could hold meetings online or in person, or in hybrid modality, subject to the availability of resources.

26. The members of the teams would be sought using the online forum and through nominations by chief statisticians of the national statistical offices of members and associate members. In that regard, national statistical offices would be invited to submit nominations for membership in specific teams. The teams would be open and inclusive and provide opportunities for staff working in national statistical offices to contribute to and learn from work being done at the regional level. The teams would report orally to the Committee's bureau at least annually. The tools, recommendations, training materials and any other results of the work of the teams would be shared with members and associate members and be submitted to the Committee for endorsement. As appropriate, teams would use the Asia-Pacific Stats Cafés to present their work and consult the wider statistical community. The Statistics Division of the Commission would serve as the secretariat for the teams and support them in carrying out their functions. The Committee's bureau may review and revise the terms of reference for the teams as a whole or for each individual team, as required, to ensure that they carry out their functions efficiently and effectively on the basis of their mandate.

F. Decision 6

27. By its decision 6, the Committee endorsed the revised terms of reference of its bureau.

28. Since the eighth session of the Committee, the bureau has held four in-person meetings and four online meetings.[8]

29. In addition, the bureau has discussed its work programme and provided guidance on the work of the secretariat by email.

III. Issues for consideration by the Committee

30. The following draft decision is proposed for adoption by the Committee at its ninth session:

Draft decision

The Committee on Statistics decides to replace its groups and communities of practice – the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the Asia-Pacific 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 – with more flexible task teams; requests the bureau, in consultation with the secretariat, to oversee the functioning of the teams; and requests the secretariat to report on the work of the teams, as appropriate, in its note on the activities of the bureau submitted to the Committee at its regular sessions, while bearing in mind the need to stay within existing regular budget resources.

31. The Committee may wish to provide the secretariat with guidance on the organization of the future work of the Committee.

[8] See ESCAP/CST(9)/5.

32. The Committee may also wish to provide comments and guidance on the implementation of all the decisions taken by the Committee at its eighth session.