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MATTERS ARISING FROM THE SIXTH AND
SEVENTH SESSIONS OF ECA

65-3010

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(Item 4a of the Provisional Agenda)

1. This paper reviews the discussions, resolutions and decisions of the Economic Commission for Africa at its sixth session, held in Addis Ababa February 19 - March 3, 1964, and at its seventh session held in Nairobi February 9-23, 1965, insofar as they are relevant to the deliberations of the Fourth Conference of African Statisticians, and gives references to the resolutions and projects for the years 1964-1965 and 1965-1966.

2. At the sixth session the representative of the secretariat explained that its work in the field of statistics for the years 1961-1963 was discussed at the third Conference of African Statisticians convened in Addis Ababa in October 1963. The views of the Conference were included in its report (E/CN.14/255 and Corr.1). Part of that work had already been reviewed by Committee I at the fifth session of the Commission in March 1963. The additional material that has become available since then was therefore singled out and it was stated that the main objective of the secretariat had been to promote the development of statistical work in the region. This was being done through training of statistical personnel, and through research and direct assistance to Governments.

3. A separate report (E/CN.14/256) summarizing progress in training activities at the national and international statistical training centres in Africa, supported or sponsored by the United Nations, was also submitted to the Commission. The aims, methods and fields of research carried out by the secretariat were explained. The types of assistance to Governments, whether by regular staff or regional advisers, were described. The secretariat also reported on its other continuing activities, which included the processing and publication of African statistical data, circulation and exchange of information, and regional and sub-regional co-ordination of statistical work.

4. Satisfaction was expressed with the efforts made in the field of statistics, as described in the report submitted to the Commission. Delegates considered that the secretariat had achieved high standards in its work and had given significant help in promoting the statistical development of their countries.

5. It was noted that the recent rapid development of national statistical services had arisen largely from the increasing demands in connexion with planning purposes, and that it had been necessary to make use of ad hoc arrangements, including assistance obtained through multilateral and bilateral sources. An urgent need now existed for revising methods and co-ordinating work to formulate new statistical programmes of a comprehensive nature. In particular it was felt that the greater emphasis being placed on planning would require new efforts by statisticians to forecast probable future data requirements.

6. The third Conference of African Statisticians had discussed the relationship between statistics and planning at some length and this subject formed one of the important items in the work programme of the Commission for the future. The secretariat was preparing a detailed working paper which would be considered by a group of statisticians and planners early in 1965. The importande of this working group was referred to by several delegates. It was also stressed that the work of the proposed conference of African planners would need to be closely co-ordinated with that of the Conference of African Statisticians.

7. In order to establish a satisfactory link between statisticians and planners in the future it was considered necessary that planners should be given some statistical training. For this purpose statistics should form an important part of the courses given at the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning in Dakar, and at the demographic training institutes established by the United Nations.

8. References were made to the statistical training programme, which still had to be regarded as the activity requiring highest priority. The supply

of statistical personnel at all levels was still limited and there remained the problem of qualified personnel being attracted away from statistics to other types of work. In general it was considered that existing training courses were satisfactory, but that United Nations co-ordination and assistance would be a continuing need in respect of all training projects. It was stressed that, particularly at the lowest levels, training should be of an essentially practical nature.

9. Two specific requests were made concerning the extension of middle level training facilities. The first related to the establishment of a centre to serve the east African countries, the need for which had been noted at the third Conference of African Statisticians. It was hoped that the centre would open in 1964 and it was urged that steps should be taken to ensure that this objective could be achieved. The other request related to the International Training Centre at Yaounde, which was originally intended to meet requirements for medium-level staff in Equatorial Africa and was now receiving nominations from a number of west African countries. Delegates requested that the necessary resources should be put at the disposal of this centre as soon as possible, to enable it to meet the new demands arising from the establishment or development of a course for technical assistants, as requested by the third Conference of African Statisticians.

10. The position of agriculture was given special consideration in the general context of the relationship between statistics and planning because of the importance of the agricultural sector in over-all development. A study of the production factors relevant to the promotion of more efficient agriculture was considered important and, in particular, capital formation in the subsistence sector needed to be investigated. Statistics of agricultural labour and production were important indicators of progress and food consumption surveys and estimates of _per caput_ income were useful in measuring social development.

11. It was suggested that the Commission might establish a special committee on agricultural statistics, which would include statisticians, economists and others respensible for co-ordinating planning operations. Such an arrangement was considered necessary if proper use was to be made of agricultural statistics for planning purposes and if agricultural development was to be satisfactorily integrated in the general development of national economies.

12. A number of specific topics were also considered and among these was the need for national statistical services to operate under a suitable law covering the collection, processing and publication of data. Respondents to statistical enquiries, particularly commercial enterprises, needed a satisfactory assurance of secrecy if their full co-operation was to be obtained.

13. External trade statistics were mentioned by several delegates and particular reference was made to the accuracy of information relatihg to trade across land frontiers. It was felt that this was a field in which the Commission might assist in developing improved methods. Some countries were doubtful about the choice between the United Nations Standard International Trade Classification, Revised,[1] and the Brussels Tariff Nomenclature, adopted in 1955 by the Customs Co-operation Council,[2] as the basic trade classification. It was pointed out that, while the choice would be dependent on particular circumstances, the conversion between the two classifications was straightforward. A draft resolution was adopted unanimously, recommending the adoption of the Brussels Tariff Nomenclature and requesting the Executive Secretary to convene a study group for the standardization of customs tariffs (resolution 107 (VI), see Annex 1).

14. Also in connexion with trade statistics, reference was made to the need for good information on marketing possibilities.

15. It was observed that the work on the analysis of African trade statistics, previously carried out by the punch card installation of the secretariat, would

1/ United Nations publication, Sales No.: 61.XVII.6.

2/ Customs Co-operation Council, Nomenclature for the classification of goods in customs tariffs, Brussels, July 1955

shortly be transferred to New York and that this would greatly reduce the secretariat's existing data-processing activities. The data-processing installations used at present were unsuitable for the purpose of undertaking much work for countries on a service basis and it was suggested that the existing equipment might be replaced by a computer which would enable the secretariat to render much better assistance to the countries in bulk processing operations and in specialized types of analysis. It was also believed that some countries with adequate data-processing installations might be in a position to assist their neighbours who had the problem of dealing with many different types of processing with limited equipment.

16. The Commission unanimously accepted the report of the third Conference of African Statisticians.

17. At the Seventh Session of the Commission a representative of the secretariat introduced the report on activities (E/CN.14/305), referred to reports on three technical meetings and a sub-regional consultations meeting held since the sixth session,[3] and drew attention to the appropriate sections in the draft programme of work and priorities (E/CN.14/313/Rev.1) and the report on training (E/CN.14/307). He stated that the main efforts in 1965 would be devoted to preparations for the Fourth Conference of African Statisticians, contribution to the international revision of the United Nations system of national accounts, preparations for the 1970 World Programme of Population Censuses, research into the programming of statistical development in Africa and arrangements for continuation of training activities.

18. Delegates expressed satisfaction with the work programme carried out by the secretariat, endorsed the vital importance of efforts to improve statistics and in particular relating them to planning activities and requirements. They suggested that further work was needed on capital formation estimates in the public and private sectors, on consumer price indices and on an adequate index for the standard of living. Work on national accounts was accorded a high priority. In this connexion, attention was drawn to the Conference of African Planners held in Dakar

3/ See E/CN.14/319, 327, 330 and 333.

in November 1964, and it was recommended that its decisions with regard to minimum statistical requirements be followed.

19. The necessity to provide training for middle-level statisticians was emphasized and the high turn-over in employment of professional statisticians was noted as a limiting factor to progress. Delegations considered some incentives necessary in this respect. The secretariat was requested to consider in co-operation with UNESCO the provision of an appropriate syllabus on statistics in African universities.

20. In reply to a question concerning the future of the Yaounde Statistical Training Centre, the representative of the secretariat stated that, considering the pressure of competing demands on regional funds, it would not be feasible for the United Nations to continue indefinitely its present level of financial support for the Centre. However, the Commission would endeavour to continue to promote the Centre's development after the initial period ending in 1966, and participating member countries should consider either their own provision for fellowships or requesting them under their technical assistance country programmes. It was also hoped that the Director's counterpart would be appointed early enough to benefit by a reasonable period of overlap with the present Director.

21. Delegates recommended consideration of transforming the Centre at Yaounde, Cameroun, into an international institute, of extending the present agreement beyond the expiry date in 1966 and of continuing United Nations financial assistance. A draft resolution co-sponsored by Cameroun, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo (Brazzaville), the Congo (Leopoldville), Ivory Coast, Mali, Nigeria and Togo was adopted unanimously (resolution 146 (VII), see Annex II).

22. It was noted that a preliminary report and the lecture notes of the Study Tour on the Relation of Statistics to Planning, organized by the Commission and the Economic Commission for Europe, had been circulated to member countries.

23. The programme of work and priorities for 1965/67, approved by the Commission at its seventh session as a first instalment of a five-year programme, included under Development of National and International Statistics' the list of projects given hereunder: Extracts from descriptions of other approved projects, relevants to work in statistics, are given in Annex III.

List of Projects

(A) Statistical survey of Africa

Description:

An over-all plan for statistical development in the region designed to bring activities of statistical offices in line with requirements for economic and social planning, and involving the following action by the secretariat:

a. Discussion with countries of technical assistance requirements in relation to national programmes for statistical development and briefing of, and co-operation with, experts.

b. Planning and supervision of a regional advisory service rendering direct assistance to countries of the region, in co-operation with the Statistical Office of the United Nations and BTAO.

Comment:

The technical assistance programmes concerning statistics are established for each two-year period through consultations among the secretariat, Headquarters, country resident representatives and national statistical offices. The 1965-1966 programme has now been adopted. Over forty United Nations technical assistance experts served in Africa in 1964. Their periodic progress reports are sent regularly to the secretariat for study and technical and practical comments. Up to now, more than thirty experts have been briefed at the Commission's headquarters on their way to their duty stations.

The advisory service, consisting of five advisers in the fields of demography, public finances statistics, national accounts, sampling and field surveys, was established in 1961. The advisors have so far undertaken more than eighty field missions in twenty-five African countries.

The Third Conference of African Statisticians recommended the expansion of the regional advisory service by the establishment of three additional posts in the fields of national accounts, statistical programming and data processing. Subject to availability of funds, this will be undertaken.

(B) Regional co-operation in training statistical personnel

Description:

Establishment and implementation of regional training programmes, based on specific needs expressed by countries, including:

a. Sub-regional or regional training centres at the different levels, and

b. A fellowship placement programme to enable junior statisticians to receive in-service training in statistical offices of the region.

Comment:

Three sub-regional middle-level statistical training centres have been established, located at Achimota (Ghana), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and Yaounde (Cameroun). An additional centre for English-speaking students is being established for East Africa. Assistance in the form of fellowships and/or teaching staff is given to other centres and training operations at Abidjan (Ivory Coast), Dar-es-Salaam, (United Republic of Tanzania), Lagos (Nigeria) and Rabat (Morocco).

The Third Conference of African Statisticians recommended that additional facilities at middle level for French speaking students be established for West Africa, as well as a higher level regional centre for English speaking students. The Conference also recommended that the Commission establish training facilities in national accounts. At its seventh session the Commission requested that the possibility be studied of

converting the Yaounde centre into an international statistical training institute open to all Africans.

A meeting of directors of training centres and university representatives is scheduled for April 1965. The meeting will discuss standardization of syllabuses and examinations, detailed arrangements for the future of middle-level centres after termination of existing arrangements with host countries and the over-all co-ordination of statistical training activities. It was also recommended at the seventh session of the Commission that the secretariat should consider, in co-operation with UNESCO, the provision of an appropriate syllabus for statistics in African universities.

(C) Formulation of statistical standards for the region

Description:

Research and documentation for the organization of seminars and working groups of experts to exchange views and study methods and to consider adaptation to Africa of international standards, in co-operation with the Statistical Office of the United Nations and the specialized agencies.

The Third Conference of African Statisticians which met in October 1963 recommended a five year programme of seminars and working groups. Within the framework of this programme, three technical meetings were held in 1964, namely a seminar on labour statistics in co-operation with the ILO, a working group on national accounts and a seminar on vital statistics.

The Fourth Conference of African Statisticians is scheduled to meet in October 1965. In addition, four technical meetings will be convened during the year: a working group of statisticians and planners will meet in March, on statistical programming, a working group on population and housing censuses will meet in June to discuss recommendations in connexion with the 1970 World Census Programme, a working group on national accounts

is scheduled to meet in July to discuss the revision and extension of the SNA, and a seminar on distribution statistics is also scheduled to take place later in 1965.

At its seventh session the Commission accorded high priority to the work on national accounts and suggested that further work was needed on capital formation estimates in the public and private sectors, on consumer price indices and on an adequate index for the standard of living.

(D) Exchange of information on statistical activities

Description:

Establishment of a system for the exchange of information on statistical activities and methods among African countries. This includes:

a. Short meetings of heads of statistical offices at the sub-regional level.

b. Study tours on specific subjects or covering specialized operations.

c. Publication of the Statistical Newsletter.

d. Preparation and publication of manuals on statistical methods adapted to African conditions.

e. Preparation, translation and circulation of reports on statistical methods.

f. Publication from time to time of bibliographies of statistical publications issued by African countries.

Comment:

A sub-regional meeting of heads of West African statistical offices was held in 1964. A similar meeting of heads of North and East African statistical offices is scheduled for 1965.

A study tour on the relation of statistics to planning which visited three African countries, the USSR and France took place in 1964. A study tour on housing statistics is scheduled for 1966. The Third Conference also recommended for future action the organization of a study tour in West Africa on problems relating to subsistence activity and shifting cultivations.

The Statistical Newsletter which was established in 1960 is now normally published on a quarterly basis.

A report on methods and problems of African population censuses which was submitted to the Third Conference of African Statisticians has been revised and extended to include the experience of all countries in the region. A first draft of a study of housing inquiries in Africa has been prepared. A report on the particular statistical problems met in the study of nomadic populations is under preparation. Studies on method and problems of migration statistics in Africa and on the definitions of economically active population used in Africa is under way.

The Third Conference recommended the continuation of work on the preparation of a manual on household surveys and the compilation of a list of technical coefficients for the use of planners.

The Conference also agreed to include the following in the work programme for the years 1963-1968:

a. Preparation of a study of demographic enquiries on a sub-national scale in the region.

b. Preparation of a report on African experiences in industrial censuses and inquiries carried out in conjunction with the 1963 World Programme.

c. Preparation of a manual on the analysis of food consumption surveys.

d. Elaboration of a summary table on staff requirements in African statistical offices.

(E) Regional co-operation in the field of data processing

Description:

a. Use of the Mechanical Unit established at the Commission's headquarters for research and demonstration purposes and for servicing countries without equipment or with insufficient processing capacity.

b. Preparation of reports on developments in data processing.

Comment:

The Mechanical Unit, established near the end of 1961, has successfully performed a number of operations including the processing of the Addis Ababa population census, a family budget survey for Asmara, external trade statistics of Ethiopia, a census of civil servants for Congo (Brazzaville), the regular tabulation of African trade statistics for the Commission's publications and the processing of the secretariat payroll. A number of requests for service are outstanding and could not be undertaken with the present equipment.

The Third Conference of African Statisticians recommended expansion of the size of the Mechanical Unit. The Conference also recommended that a group of experts be convened to review the problems of data processing in Africa in greater detail and to draw up a programme of regional co-operation in the field. This will be undertaken when funds and staff resources allow.

(F) Processing and publication of statistical data

Description:

a. Compilation and analysis of statistical data required for:

- A General bulletin on African Statistics

- African Trade Statistics, series A and series B
- Annual and quarterly bulletin on Production Statistics of agricultural, mining and industrial commodities.

b. Compilation and analysis of statistical data required by research divisions of the secretariat.

c. The preparation of statistical handbooks which contain a detailed analysis and evaluation of data assembled in various fields of statistics.

Comment:

Statistical appendices were previously published as annexes to the Economic Bulletin for Africa. It is considered better to issue in the future an independent bulletin on African Statistics. Resources permitting, this bulletin may appear twice a year.

Series A of African Trade Statistics shows the direction of trade of African countries and is published quarterly. The latest issue refers to June 1964. Series B of the same publication gives a detailed classification of imports and exports by commodity group and country of origin and destination. The latest issue contains figures for the period January-December 1963 and is now in the process of printing. The geographical coverage of series B has been progressively extended during the last years.

Two preliminary issues of both the annual and the quarterly bulletins on Production Statistics of agricultural, mining and industrial commodities have been issued and were sent to countries for comments. Both bulletins will for their most recent information depend on data supplied directly from statistical offices.

Special compilations for research purposes in the secretariat have during the last year been made in the fields of manufacturing, energy, national accounts, transport statistics and social statistics. In particular, much continuous work is being undertaken

in connexion with the Economic Survey of Africa and various social development projects.

The tables for the African demographic handbook have been completed and are available in mimeographed form.

The Handbook on National Accounts for Africa was discussed in draft form by the Working Group on National Accounts of African countries in December 1964 and is now being issued in final form, taking into account the comments of the Working Group.

ANNEX I

Resolution 107 (VI). Standard Customs Nomenclature

The Economic Commission for Africa,

Bearing in mind recommendation No. 3 in the report of the Standing Committee on Trade on its second session (E/CN.14/253),

Considering that it would be desirable to establish a standard form of customs tariff nomenclature for all African countries as a means of facilitating customs operations and tariff negotiations,

Noting that twenty-eight African countries have already adopted, or are in the process of adopting, a uniform tariff nomenclature,

Believing that the adoption by the remaining African countries of this uniform tariff nomenclature is an essential condition for the successful conclusion and execution of multilateral treaties for the liberalization of intra-African trade and the eventual formation of an African common market,

Recalling that the Brussels Tariff Nomenclature is the only internationally recognized standard classification of goods specifically designed for customs tariff purposes and is the form of standard tariff instrument adopted, or to be adopted, by the twenty-eight African countries mentioned above and by more than eighty countries in all,

1. Recommends the adoption of the Brussels Tariff Nomenclature by all African countries which have not yet adopted it;

2. Recommends likewise that these countries seek and accept the co-operation of the Economic Commission for Africa and the Customs Co-operation Council in the transposition of their existing tariffs to the Brussels Tariff Nomenclature;

3. Requests the Executive Secretary to convene in 1964, or as soon as possible, a study group for the standardization of customs tariff nomenclature to enable the above countries, with the assistance of customs experts drawn from the Commission and the Council, to undertake the immediate and simultaneous transposition of their tariffs to the Brussels Tariff Nomenclature.

ANNEX II

Resolution 146 (VII). Conversion of the Yaounde Statistical Training Centre into an African statistical training institute

The Economic Commission for Africa,

Recognizing the importance of statistics in the process of economic and social development,

Aware of the needs of the African countries in this field,

Noting the growing importance of the Yaounde Centre by reason of the increase in the number of its students, its African function, and the geographical range of its instruction,

1. Welcomes the great success of the Centre and the assistance provided by the United Nations;

2. Requests the Executive Secretary to renew the agreement governing the Centre between the United Nations and the Federal Republic of Cameroun;

3. Requests the Executive Secretary to make representations to the appropriate organizations with a view to one or more permanent teachers being made available to the Centre;

4. Requests the Executive Secretary to study the question of converting the Centre into an international statistical training institute open to all Africans and op rating under the auspices of the United Nations and the host country, and to report to the Commission at the eighth session;

5. Invites the Executive Secretary to propose technical and financial methods of contributing to the development of the institute.

ANNEX III

Extracts from projects in the work programme of the Commission relevant to work in statistics

A. Population

Description:

Studies of demographic structures and trends to provide basic information and analysis for planning economic and social development including:

a. Studies and evaluation of the over-all demographic indicators provided by the population censuses, sample surveys and vital statistics registration.

b. Projections of the regional, sub-regional and national population by segments (rural and urban population, school-age population, manpower etc.).

c. Studies on the inter-relationship of population growth and economic and social development and on demographic and manpower aspects of African development plans.

Comment:

a. Projections of population of Africa up to 2000 A.D. for five sub-regions by age and sex were prepared for internal use by the secretariat. Projection of population by segments will be made as required.

b. A study of the demographic problems and priorities in Africa under the Development Decade, for the Meeting of Experts Committee on Social Development, 1965.

c. A study of demographic effects of urbanization.

(B) Demographic training

Description:

Establishment of sub-regional demographic training and research centres and assistance in training activities and related research.

The North African Demographic Training and Research Centre was established in Cairo in 1963.

The secretariat arranged for the second training course starting in November 1964. Preliminary work was undertaken and will be continued to establish a second sub-regional centre to meet the needs of the other African countries.

(C) Standardization of customs tariff nomenclature, harmonization of rates of customs duties and other import charges, and uniform classification of revenues arising therefrom

Description:

A Assistance to African countries in adopting the Brussels Nomenclature, comparative studies of the rates of customs duties and other import charges, and establishment of uniform systems of classification of customs revenues in order to facilitate zonal, sub-regional or regional customs integration, and an assessment of the nature and extent of tariff changes involved therein, as well as the fiscal effects of such changes.

Comment:

a. Assistance to African countries in the transposition of their tariffs to the Brussels Nomenclature will be continued. This will include the preparation of a manual of instructions dealing with its effective implementation.

b. Examination and analysis of existing rates of customs duties etc., will be undertaken in the context of proposals for customs integration.

c. Comparative studies will be undertaken of the various revenue classification of customs duties etc., in order to identify and resolve difficulties encountered in establishing uniform systems of classification.

(D) Intra-African assistance and training facilities in Africa

Description:

Survey of training facilities in Africa by fields of activity and by categories of personnel. Promotion of intra-African assistance on a bilateral basis, through the Commission and the specialized agencies.

Comment:

This survey has been initiated in co-operation with the specialized agencies, in particular UNESCO, the ILO and FAO, and in consultation with African Governments and African universities, research institutions and other appropriate organizations.

(E) Training facilities and rosters of African training outside Africa

Description:

A survey of facilities for training and of Africans now undergoing or who have undergone training outside Africa, by fields of activity and by categories of personnel.