



ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
Second Conference of African Statisticians
26 June, 1961, Tunis
Item 4(b) of the Provisional Agenda

MATTERS ARISING FROM
THE ELEVENTH SESSION
OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION

(Note by the Secretariat)

1. The Statistical Commission of the United Nations held its eleventh session from 20th April to 5th May, 1960. All subjects mentioned in its report (document E/3375) are of course of interest to members of the Conference. Some subjects are however of particular interest, either because the Commission itself is drawing the attention of regional conferences or because they are related to conditions in Africa. An extract from the Commission's discussions and recommendations is given below on the following topics (numbers refer to paragraphs of document E/3375): Regional activities (11-13), industrial statistics (22-41), external trade statistics (56-64), capital formation in under-developed countries (65-72), input-output techniques (73-78), national accounting (79-88), household surveys (103-109), 1960 world population census (128-132) balance of payment (139-142), training of statisticians (152-154). Tentative conclusions will be submitted to the Conference at the end of this paper, as to the impact of these recommendations on the work of the Conference.

Regional Activities.

2. Paragraphs 11, 12 of the report read as follows:

The Commission paid special attention to the new regional activities in statistics, such as those represented by regional conferences of statisticians and the designation of regional statisticians by the United Nations and the specialized agencies. These developments were welcomed as they would do much to draw into international work the national statisticians of most countries. The system of conferences and working parties was extremely valuable in providing means for the exchange of experience at the operational level so as to explore practical techniques which took account of conditions prevailing in the different regions. They were also useful in evolving regional programmes which might be of special interest to the region. The regional activities were especially pertinent to the solution of problems connected with plans and policies for economic and social development.

The presence of regional statisticians attached to the offices of the offices of the United Nations regional economic commissions, and of regional statisticians attached to the regional offices of the specialized agencies, was seen to be a valuable device to assist countries, especially those with less well-developed statistical systems, on special statistical problems. These arrangements seemed to be both practical and economical. Their availability might limit the need for longer term consultants from outside the region. The regional statisticians, moreover, would be fully conversant with conditions in the region and with practical methods for the solution of problems. The possibilities of extending these arrangements might be emphasized.

3. The Commission requested (para 13) that the reports of regional conferences and of their working parties should be sent to members of the Commission, and that the availability of these reports should be drawn to the attention of national statistical offices of Member

States so that they could request them if they wished. The Secretariat indicated that suitable arrangements to meet these requests would be made.

Industrial Statistics.

4. The Commission reviewed the "International Standards in basic Industrial Statistics" in the light of proposals discussed in various regional meetings and put forward in a memorandum prepared by the secretariat. The Commission felt that these proposals, after incorporating conclusions reached during the discussions, would provide suitable guidance in the development of industrial statistics and requested the Secretary-General (resolution 1(XI)) "to prepare a publication setting out the proposals in document E/CN.3/257 revised in the light of the discussions of the Commission".
5. In resolution 2(XI), the Commission also - requested the Secretary-General to prepare a publication setting out the recommendations for the 1963 World Programme of basic Industrial Statistics as approved by the Commission;

Called the attention of the Governments of States Members of the United Nations to resolution 676B (XXVI) of the Economic and Social Council, which recommended the compilation of basic data on industry for 1963, or a year close to 1963, taking into account as far as possible the international recommendations on this subject; Invited the Secretary-General to provide technical guidance and assistance, in the planning and conduct of inquiries that are to be part of the 1963 World Programme, by means of technical studies and seminars and the provision of expert assistance, and means for regional consultations.

6. In discussing the programme, particular mention was made of the special problems associated with the coverage of small household-centred industries and of the special importance of sampling in the less developed countries (para 39). The Commission also paid attention to data relating to capital expenditure for fixed assets, which should

be collected in the survey year from the larger establishments because of their importance for economic planning (para. 38).

External Trade Statistics.

7. The Commission noted with satisfaction that more than eighty countries currently compiled data according to the "Standard international trade classification" (SITC) and considered a proposal for combining the SITC and the 1955 "Brussels tariff nomenclature" (BTN), which required some modification of both classifications. The BTN was in use as the basis of customs nomenclature in many European and African countries. Because external trade statistics are largely based on customs data, the Commission considered that all the countries wishing to profit from the advantages of the SITC and of the BTN would greatly benefit from the simplification of the relations between them contained in the new proposal. It therefore recommended (resolution 6 (XI)) that "countries now compiling data according to the SITC shall, as is convenient to them, substitute for it the SITC, Revised, and that countries implementing resolution 299 (XI) for the first time do so, if possible, on the basis of the SITC, Revised, it being understood that Member States which have based customs nomenclature on the original SITC may not wish to make the change until they would, in any case, be reviewing their customs nomenclatures.

National Accounts - Capital Formation Statistics in under-developed Countries.

8. The Commission welcomed a memorandum prepared by the Secretariat on "the measurement of gross domestic capital formation in under-developed countries" (E/CN.3/265). In discussing this memorandum, the Commission stressed (para 70) that "capital formation statistics for under-developed countries would serve the purposes of these countries better if specific attention was paid to that part of the capital formation which was clearly concerned with expanding industrial output"

9. The Commission was strongly of the opinion (para 71) that "capital formation statistics should be based on genuine inquiry (whether complete, quasi-complete or on a sample basis) rather than having recourse to conjecture. The Commission felt that the quality of capital formation statistics could be improved substantially if under-developed countries would take steps to use:
- (a) More realistic allocation and mark-up percentages for imports and locally produced goods. These factors should be based on cost analysis studies and on a use of the most detailed information available on imports;
 - (b) Follow-up studies to adjust the value of construction figures obtained from building permits;
 - (c) Technological ratios based on a study of typical building costs, where the input method is employed;
 - (d) The direct expenditure approach, wherever possible, in conjunction with the commodity-flow method;
 - (e) Sampling methods to obtain estimates of capital formation, particularly in small-scale industry, rural construction and agriculture."
- Finally it requested the Secretary-General, inter alia, to "advise and assist States Members of the United Nations in improving their estimates of capital formation by every means possible, including regional seminars, training programmes, experts and fellowship". (resolution 7 (XI)).

National Accounts - Input-Output Techniques

10. It was agreed by the Commission that tables of inter-industry relations could be valuable as a method of describing the inter-relationship of different sectors of the economy, as an aid in assessing the accuracy and completeness of statistical systems and in improving work on national accounts, but undue reliance should not be placed on the inter-industry approach in planning economic development in the less developed countries, nor should high priority be given to input output studies.

11. Attention was also drawn on the method of material balances used by Member States with centrally planned economies and the Secretariat was requested to take this work into consideration. It is worth noting, in this connection, that no mention was made at the Commission of the wide use of similar methods in Africa or elsewhere by non-centrally planned economies.

National Accounts - Other Topics

12. The Commission noted with approval the publications of the second edition of a system of National Accounts and supporting tables, referred to as SNA (Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 2/Rev.1). It was felt that this work should be continued so that complete accord might be reached concerning various international and regional organizations concerned.(1)
13. The Commission (para. 86) "discussed at some length the needs of under-developed countries, particularly with regard to the development of national accounting statistics, and it was agreed that high priority" should be given to more detailed work on the problems of these countries. It noted with interest (para. 87) "that in 1961 meetings would be held in Africa by the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa."
14. It was pointed out (para. 86) "that countries at an early stage of development face special problems in compiling the statistics necessary for economic development. In this connexion it was agreed that studies of particular sectors were more important and that global estimates serve largely to provide a general reference for comparisons of relative magnitudes. It was agreed that the Secretary-General should investigate, on the basis of national needs and available statistical resources, the priorities which should be followed by under-developed Member States

(1) United Nations, Organization for European Economic Co-operation and International Monetary Fund.

seeking to improve their statistical compilations. It was suggested that attention should be focussed on statistics of distribution of income in under-developed countries. Data in constant prices and quantities of physical flows would also be of value in these countries. The need to improve the quality of statistics collected was urgent and high priority should be given to this aspect. The Commission was unanimous as to the desirability of joint studies by specific under-developed Member States with the Statistical Office of the United Nations with a view to determining basic statistical needs and feasibilities and assisting in their realization."

15. Finally, in resolution 9 (XI), the Commission requested, inter alia, the Secretary-General:

To accord high priority to the study of methods for improving the quality of items of national accounts statistics;

To continue, in co-operation with the regional statistical conferences, the study of the co-ordination of existing systems of national accounts with systems of the balance of the national economy in use in centrally planned economies;

To pay close attention to the needs of under-developed States Members of the United Nations in developing reliable statistics relating to national accounts, distribution of income, financial statistics, and constant price statistics and to provide all possible assistance to these countries, particularly in the direction of examining the priorities which should be adopted in compiling these statistics".

Methodology of Household Surveys

16. The Commission noted (para. 107) that sample surveys of family living conditions and of small scale economic entities were of great importance, especially for less developed countries, and recommended inter alia, (resolution 12 (XI)) that the Secretary-General should "convene, in consultation with the specialized agencies, an ad hoc working group of

specialists in sample survey methods and of statisticians from the United Nations and the specialized agencies, for the purpose of recommending methods of collecting statistics for the Compendium of Social Statistics and for social programmes generally, particularly in the less developed countries."

Housing Statistics

17. In Resolution 13 (XI), the Commission requested the Secretary-General:

"To pursue the work in the field of housing statistics, especially in the following aspects: (a) Development of statistical indicators of housing conditions; (b) Development of methods of estimating housing needs, adapted to the conditions of the various regions; (c) Studies of statistical methods of testing the compatibility of housing needs and national resources; and (d) Development of international standards for current housing statistics;

That in conducting the work, special attention be given to the needs of the under-developed countries in the several regions, and that, where possible, regional working groups on housing statistics formed by statisticians and representatives of agencies concerned with housing programmes be organized".

1960 World Population Census

18. The Commission was informed of the publication of the world wide "Principles and Recommendations for National Population Censuses" (statistical paper no.27), the completion of the three-volume "Handbook of Population Census Methods", the issuance of part I of the Handbook on data processing methods, the organization of training courses to prepare personnel for national census taking as well as evaluation and utilization of census results, and the extent of direct assistance being rendered in census field. Members of the

The Commission expressed gratification at the success achieved in developing a world-wide census programme as evidenced by the number of countries (sixty-eight) which had already taken a census of population during the period 1955-1959 and the larger number (141) planned for 1960-1964. Interest was expressed in having further exchange of national experience in the use of electronic data processing, with special reference to the possibility of eliminating the conventional punch card stage as developed to some current censuses and surveys.

Balance of Payment Statistics

19. It was suggested (para. 142) that "just as there was need for special classification of international trade suited to under-developed countries, so too it may be desirable to develop a balance of payments system related more directly to the needs of under-developed countries."

Training of Statisticians

20. The urgent need for statistical education and training at all levels was stressed by the Commission, and the efforts made by several national governments and the international agencies to develop training institutions was noted with satisfaction. It was agreed (para. 153) "as far as the training of intermediate and lower level personnel was concerned, that this might best be done at national, sub-regional or regional levels. This would enable training to be carried on in close relationship with the actual work and under conditions with which the trainees were familiar."

21. In relation to conditions of service, the Commission noted (para. 154) that "in many areas conditions of service, including tenure and remuneration, were not such as to appeal to trained personnel; there tended to be considerable attrition of these officers to government posts offering better conditions of employment and to the private sector."

The Commission wished particularly to stress the need for strengthened services with adequate conditions of employment, especially in the light of the very urgent needs for improved statistical services in connexion with problems of industrialization and development. The Secretary-General might take advantage of any ways open to him to impress these considerations upon Member States. In this connexion it was important to note the continued need to relate statistics directly to the specific uses to be served; this would call also for the training of administrators who could assist in the effective organization and use of statistics for the formulation and conduct of economic policy.

Conclusions

22. The attention of the conference is drawn to the following subjects on which the above mentioned views of the Commission may have an impact on the discussions relating to various agenda items:

- external trade statistics (provisional agenda item 7c)
- national accounts (" " " 7a)
- 1960 World Census of Population (" " " 7b)
- Training of Statisticians (" " " 6)

23. Finally, in deciding its programme of work for 1961-63, (item 8 of provisional agenda) the Conference may wish to take into account the recommendations of the Commission regarding the desirability of work at the regional level in the following subjects:

- Industrial statistics
- External trade statistics
- National accounts
- Household surveys
- Demographic statistics
- Balance of payment statistics
- Training of statisticians.