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REPORT OF MEETING OF DIRECTORS
OF MIDDLE-LEVEL STATISTICAL
TRAINING CENTRES

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraph</u>	<u>Page</u>
FOREWORD		1
REPORT OF THE MEETING		
I. 1962-63 COURSES		
Syllabus and level of courses	1-8	3
Question papers	9-10	5
Marking arrangements	11	6
Certificates	12	6
II. 1963-64 COURSES		
Entrance arrangements	13-14	6
Fellowship procedures	15-16	7
III. DEVELOPMENT OF MIDDLE-LEVEL TRAINING		
Introduction of higher level and specialized courses	17-18	7
Training programmes and requirements	19-23	8
The future of the international centres	24	9
Co-ordination of training and promotion qualifications	25	10
IV. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS	26-28	10
Annex I.	List of participants.	
Annex II.	Agenda.	
Annex III.	Procedure to be followed for selection of candidates for UN assisted training centres.	
Annex IV.	Training centre syllabuses.	

FOREWORD

The first meeting of United Nations experts associated with middle-level statistical training centres and in-service schemes in various parts of Africa was small and of an informal nature, but had an important function in co-ordinating existing activities and in investigating the possible lines along which the training programme might develop in the future. It will be appreciated that such training must be regarded as an essential first step towards comprehensive statistical development which is urgently needed in view of the more widespread application of technical planning methods.

At the time of the Second Conference of African Statisticians in July 1961 the various training centres were in the final stages of planning and the project received the full support of the countries as it was clear that an intensive training programme was a requirement of first importance. The ECA Secretariat was specifically requested to co-ordinate statistical training activities throughout the region, the objectives being common standards of training and courses of instruction properly adapted to African conditions.

The meeting of Directors was suggested as a result of experience gained from the 1961-62 courses of the middle level centres, for which the Secretariat had undertaken to assist in conducting the final examinations in statistical method and mathematics. The operation was completed successfully, but the secretariat members who took part in it did not have the advantage of a detailed knowledge of the content of individual courses at each centre or the method of their presentation. It was therefore felt that the setting and marking of question papers was more appropriately a function of the centres themselves. To achieve this arrangement, while still maintaining adequate co-ordination, it was clearly necessary that those in charge of centres, etc., should be enabled to meet. The Directors of the centres and UN Headquarters expressed agreement with this proposal and arrangements

were therefore made for the meeting which took place in Addis Ababa from 16 to 19 April 1963.

Participants at the meeting were the Directors or Directors of Studies of the three international centres co-sponsored by African Governments and the United Nations, three experts in charge of national schemes similar to those operated by the centres and representatives of FAO, WHO and the ECA Secretariat. The Director of the Ivory Coast centre was unfortunately unable to attend. The list of participants is given in Annex I.

The meeting in no way affected the existing arrangements for the running of the training centres and in-service schemes. It was simply intended that it should provide an opportunity for UN training experts in different parts of the African region to undertake a detailed discussion on the technical aspects of their work. Under those circumstances individual participants are expected to report the outcome of the discussions to the appropriate authorities in the countries where they are working so that any action required can be negotiated in the normal way. In addition, as the results of the meeting are of general interest to the countries of the region, this report is being submitted to the Third Conference of African Statisticians.

The meeting was opened by Mr. A.F. Ewing, Officer-in-Charge of the ECA Secretariat, who referred to the points included in this introduction and observed that the methods developed for the teaching of statistics in Africa could well be expected to find additional applications in other fields.

Mr. David Dinour, Director of the Achimota centre, was unanimously elected Chairman of the meeting.

The principal topics for discussion were the syllabus, the final examinations at the end of the 1962-63 courses and arrangements for the 1963-64 session. In addition it was necessary to consider the future development of middle-level training in general terms. After discussing the provisional agenda, it was decided to deal with the syllabus in conjunction with arrangements for the current session instead of that in 1963-64 as originally suggested and a miscellaneous item was also added (No. 6). The

agenda, as adopted, is shown in Annex II.

REPORT OF THE MEETING

I. 1962-63 COURSES

Syllabus and level of courses.

1. Discussion on courses in the different centres has disclosed different levels of teaching, due mainly to different educational backgrounds of the students and also to language problems. While the Yaoundé centre has so far concentrated on the statistical clerk grade (agent technique), the minimum level aimed at in the other centres has been equivalent to that of Registered Statistical Assistant of the London Institute of Statisticians. It should be noted that, in some cases, a considerably higher standard has been reached and, at both Dar-es-Salaam and Lagos, there has been additional coaching for the Intermediate examination of the Institute of Statisticians. Such differences have been discussed at recent sub-regional meetings of heads of statistical offices and the conclusion has always been that no centre should lower its level of teaching for the sake of achieving overall uniformity. The problem is therefore to raise the standard in centres which are teaching at a lower level. It is understood that Middle-level training will commence in the Yaoundé centre in 1963-64 so this centre may shortly be expected to reach the same level as the other centres.
2. In spite of the differences noted above, it is observed that the syllabuses for the major subjects are broadly similar in most centres. It is therefore recommended that the continued use of these syllabuses should be approved for the immediate future.

3. It is believed, however, that an important modification is needed in respect of the practice sometimes adopted of teaching statistical method in a mechanical way. This leads to considerable danger from misapplication of techniques and it is recommended that more stress should be placed on achieving an understanding of methods used and to refrain from formula teaching.

4. Because of the low availability of suitable candidates it is still necessary for some centres to accept persons who are below G.C.E. (O) or brevet elementaire level and it is recommended that countries sending such students should arrange for them to take preparatory courses in mathematics before they join the centres. Refresher courses are also desirable for students who have been a considerable time out of school. It is realized that such preparatory courses would require special administrative arrangements and, if possible, the help of in-service training officers, but it is pointed out that it is a means by which equalization of levels in all the centres can be achieved.

5. It is recommended that formal teaching of official statistics should be included in all centres, but the slant on different topics should be adjusted to sub-regional needs. A necessary part of this teaching is the execution of a specific project. This would normally take the form of a limited enquiry in a particular field such as agricultural, household or industrial surveys, price collection and index number construction, etc. It is important that project work should include all stages of the statistical operation.

6. It is stressed that the teaching of background subjects such as economics, accountancy, etc., should be carried out only to the extent that it is required for a better understanding of material used for the compilation of statistics. In economics a general elementary explanation should be given of the operation of the economy and of basic economic concepts. This should include some notions on national income, determination of prices and the operations of the public sector. Teaching in subjects such as economics should be specifically adapted to the needs of the students and first year

university courses should not be used.

7. The Yaoundé centre includes economic geography as one of its subjects and it is noted that other centres do not find it necessary to include this type of course. It is, however, recognized that such training may perhaps be useful in giving students a broader understanding of world-economic problems.

8. It is recommended that, in all training schemes, stress should be placed on the teaching of computational methods.

Question papers.

9. For most centres the actual question papers to be used at the end of the 1962-63 courses have been examined and, in general, they indicate a much higher level of teaching than was envisaged at the outset of the training programme. It is observed that, while the Lagos and Achimota papers are on a similar level, the way in which the questions are put is different. On the other hand there is a similarity in the form of questions between the Achimota and Addis Ababa centres. The Dar-es-Salaam questions are also similar, but on a higher level in mathematics. The Yaoundé centre, which until now has trained statistical clerks only, cannot be compared with the other centres. Whilst it is agreed that similarity in the level of question papers should be the general aim, it is clear that the form of the questions must necessarily reflect the method of presentation of the courses and should be left to the discretion of the individual centres. It is therefore recommended that the question papers should be left to stand as presented at the meeting.

10. It is recommended that machinery should be set up with the general aim of achieving greater uniformity between the centres, thereby giving a more precise meaning to the examinations of the centres and the certificates which are issued. It is appreciated, however, that this uniformity can be attained only when students of a common level are available, which means

that the process of standardization must take some time. The proposal concerning the establishment of suitable machinery is given in paragraph 28.

Marking arrangements.

11. It is realized that no immediate attempt can be made to standardize marking arrangements between the different centres. However, the relative importance of accuracy versus general understanding in marking has been discussed. A general exchange of information on experience in marking in the centres has also taken place. Recommendations in this field must be postponed until the future of the centres and their aims have been more fully examined.

Certificates.

12. It is recommended that certificates should be issued only to successful candidates. These would include all those with a full pass and those who have failed in not more than one subject. Detailed information on the performance of all candidates should, however, be made available to the respective governments. It is considered advisable that grades for all main subjects should be shown on the certificates.

II. 1963-64 COURSES

Entrance arrangements.

13. It is recommended that, in all cases where there are more candidates than places, competitive examinations should be the basis on which students are accepted by the centres. It is considered that this is the only fair evaluation for the award of a fellowship.

14. Formal educational qualifications of G.C.E.(O) level or brevet elementaire are a desirable future aim for entry to all the centres, but it is agreed that, in view of the low availability of candidates with these qualifications at the present time, some flexibility should be allowed.

Fellowship procedures.

15. It has been agreed that allocation of the available UN fellowships for each centre between countries should be initially negotiated by the Directors of the centres with the countries served by those centres, while final allocations are subject to the approval of the Executive Secretary of ECA. Allocation of fellowships within a country will be arranged through the official representative designated by the government. It is observed that institutions other than central statistical offices may wish to make use of the training facilities. However, no contact with institutions should be made except through the official representative designated for that purpose.

16. Procedures for the award of fellowships have been discussed in some detail and, at the request of the meeting, the ECA Secretariat has drawn up a note summarizing these procedures in the light of the discussions and the relevant UN regulations for fellowship awards. The aim is to give Directors of the centres as free a hand as possible in finalizing arrangements on a direct basis. The note prepared by the Secretariat is given as Annex III to this report.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF MIDDLE-LEVEL TRAINING

Introduction of higher level and specialized courses.

17. It is considered that there is a definite need to provide facilities for further study which would enable selected students to reach the level of fully professional statisticians. Considering the

basic educational standard of existing middle-level students, however, there is difficulty in providing such facilities through universities. It is therefore recommended that the establishment of a higher level centre for selected students should be considered. Such a centre exists, in fact, for the French-speaking African countries at Rabat and special consideration should be given to the creation of similar facilities for English-speaking students in Africa. This more advanced centre should be based on internationally recognized standards for professional statisticians and its intake would be mainly from the middle-level statistical training centres.

18. It is recognized that there is an additional need for special courses in subjects not adequately covered by the general middle-level courses. It is noted that the introduction of a special agricultural statistics course in the Yaoundé centre is being investigated in co-operation with FAO. However, it is realized that courses on experimental design and similar specialist topics require a higher level of training in both statistical theory and methods than can be reached in the middle-level centres. Such courses should therefore be included in the training programme of the more advanced centre. At the same time it is recommended that stress should be placed on special topics in the existing centres, e.g., demographic and health statistics, agricultural statistics, etc.

Training programmes and requirements.

19. In view of the definite conclusion reached by the meeting on the need for a higher level English-speaking centre to supplement the work already being done in Rabat, the question of the nature of the training programme at each level and its adaptation to African conditions has not been examined in detail. It is considered more appropriate for this to be examined in conjunction with the establishment of the proposed new centre. However, it is noted that, as many African countries are making use of the courses and examinations of the London Institute of Statisticians,

an African scheme of a similar nature might well prove to be the most satisfactory arrangement.

20. Training requirements have been considered only at the middle-level and it is clear that no accurate numerical assessment can be made because of rapidly changing conditions in the countries. However, the following recommendations indicate the principal requirements for the development of the middle-level training programme in the immediate future.

21. It is recommended that training facilities in the UAR should be extended to other Arabic-speaking countries in North Africa. This would remove the existing language difficulty in the Addis Ababa centre, which would then cater mainly for Ethiopian and Sudanese students.

22. Considering the growth of the needs of newly emerging and already emergent countries in East and Central Africa, an English-speaking centre in the area is considered the most economical way of meeting the requirements of the countries concerned.

23. It is realized that the capacity of the Yaoundé centre is too small to meet the needs of the surrounding French-speaking countries. It is therefore recommended that an additional international centre should be established to cater for the French-speaking West African countries, or, alternatively, that the existing facilities at Yaoundé and Abidjan should be expanded. It is noted that in-service training is already being undertaken in Mali and Guinea, but this is at a lower level and is designed mainly to prepare students for the Abidjan and Yaoundé centres.

The future of the international centres.

24. Informal views have been exchanged on the future of the existing international centres. It is believed that host governments will wish the centres at Achimota, Addis Ababa and Yaoundé to continue beyond the present five year arrangement involving co-sponsorship with the UN. In some cases this would possibly be on a national basis, although centres developing in this way could continue to provide facilities for students

of other countries with the help of UN and other fellowships. It is recommended that, if such national centres should turn to the UN for advice and help, this assistance should continue to be made available. It is observed that, in any case, there will be a continuing need for co-ordination of training activities throughout the region.

Co-ordination of training and promotion qualifications.

25. It is recommended that countries in the region should recognize the certificates issued by the centres as a basis for eligibility for appointment to middle-level posts in statistical offices. In West and East Africa this has been almost fully achieved.

IV. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

26. It is recommended that UN and Specialized Agencies should arrange to provide all current statistical documents and methodological papers in appropriate languages on a regular basis to the centres and it is further considered desirable that methodological papers, at least, should be provided in sufficient numbers for issue to individual students.

27. It is recommended that the Directors of centres should report on how trainees have been absorbed into the government services in their own countries with the object of assessing the value of the training programme. It is realized, however, that such reports can cover only the initial period after the completion of training. An investigation of this type has already been carried out for Yaoundé trainees.

28. It is recommended that Directors of centres and experts in charge of training schemes of a similar nature should in future meet annually with the principal object of obtaining uniformity and co-ordination in training activities. Such meetings will also enable them to exchange views on common problems and to acquire a broader knowledge of the training programme as a whole. This recommendation is suggested as a suitable means of meeting the need for co-ordinating machinery referred to in paragraph 10.

List of participants

Training experts.

Mr. D. Dinour	Director, Achimota Statistical Training Centre, Ghana.
Mr. C.A.Ellis	Director, Addis Ababa Statistical Training Centre, Ethiopia.
Mr. J. Prasad	Organization and training expert, Central Statistical Office, Ethiopia.
Mr. A. Serré	Director of Studies, Yaoundé Statistical Training centre, Cameroon.
Mr. M.P.Shrivastava	Training Officer, Federal Office of Statistics, Nigeria.
Mr. K.S. Srikantan	Training Officer, Division of Statistics The Treasury, Tanganyika.

Representatives of Specialized Agencies

Mr. S. Mazumdar	Regional Statistician for Africa, FAO.
Mr. M. Pawel	Regional Statistical Adviser, WHO.

ECA Secretariat

Mr. B. El-Tawil	Chief, Statistics Division.
Mr. W.L. Booker	Chief, Statistical Development Section.
Mr. B.S. Mahajan	Deputy Chief, Statistical Development Section.

Servicing

Miss D. Barnich	Interpreter.
Miss M. Croset	Administrative Assistant.
Mrs. J. Admasu.	Secretary.

Agenda

1. Election of Chairman.
2. Adoption of agenda.
3. 1962-63 courses
 - (a) Syllabus and level of courses
 - (b) Question papers
 - (c) Marking arrangements
 - (d) Certificates
4. 1963-64 courses.
 - (a) Entrance arrangements
 - (b) Fellowship procedures
5. Development of middle-level training.
 - (a) Introduction of higher level courses
 - (b) Training programmes
 - (c) Training requirements
 - (d) Future organization of centres
 - (e) Co-ordination of training and promotion qualifications.
6. Other business.

PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED FOR SELECTION OF CANDIDATES
FOR UN ASSISTED TRAINING CENTRES

UN fellowships

1. ECA to inform Directors of training centres of the number of UN fellowships included in the approved budget of the Centre.
2. Directors should make recommendations to ECA for the country allocations.
3. Directors inform the various countries of their allocation asking the government to submit fellowship applications for their candidates to the Centre concerned.
4. At the same time as (3), ECA send formal letters to Governments inviting fellowship nominations, indicating that detailed arrangements will be made by Directors of centres.
5. Directors of Centres send examination papers to statistical offices.
6. When entrance examination papers are returned, Directors make selection of candidates.
7. Directors inform ECA of their selection by cable.
8. ECA simultaneously informs UNBTAO of the selection asking for delegation of funds, confirms to Directors of Centres approval of awards by the Executive Secretary and formally informs the countries of the selection.
9. When delegation of funds is received from BTAO, ECA authorize either UNTAB Offices in various countries or Directors of Centres to issue air tickets to fellows.
10. Any changes in the award of fellowships, arranged as indicated above, which may become necessary should be cleared with ECA by cable. Any additional requirements for fellowships which

arise at a late stage in the procedure should also be notified by cable to ECA.

Fellowships awarded by other agencies.

11. The procedure in respect of fellowships awarded by agencies other than UN is broadly similar to that indicated above. Once the availability of UN fellowships is known, Directors of centres will assist countries in assessing their requirements from other sources, bearing in mind the capacity of the centres. It is then the responsibility of the countries themselves to apply to the agencies concerned, but Directors of centres and ECA will assist in co-ordinating this operation. Candidates will be selected for admission to the centres in the same way as for UN fellowships, but it should be noted that some agencies also have their own requirements in respect of examinations, etc. Arrangements for the award of fellowships by agencies other than UN can be greatly facilitated by including representatives of the agencies in the Advisory Boards of the centres.