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REPORT ON
REGIONAL CO-OPERATION
IN THE FIELD OF STATISTICS

61-1578

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The work done by the Secretariat in the field of Statistics can be conveniently considered under three main headings, as follows:

- (i) Promotion in Africa of statistical activities adequate to meet the requirements of economic and social planners for statistical data. Under this project, referred to as the Statistical Survey of Africa, all African countries have been requested to prepare and implement five-year programmes of intensive statistical development.
- (ii) Formulation of statistical methods and standards appropriate to conditions prevalent in Africa.
- (iii) Servicing member countries by publishing statistical series covering the African region, presented in as comparable a form as possible.

2. The progress made in these three directions was reviewed by the Second Conference of African Statisticians (convened by the Executive Secretary at Tunis in June, 1961) the report of which is submitted to the fourth session of the Commission as document E/CN.14/113. The activities undertaken are summarized below, together with the Conference conclusions and recommendations regarding future plans.

II. THE STATISTICAL SURVEY OF AFRICA

3. So far nineteen member and associate member countries have submitted long-term programmes of statistical development. In most of the others preliminary investigation and exploratory discussions are taking place with a view to the formulation of programmes in the light of the priorities considered appropriate and the limitations of the countries' resources. A few countries reported to the

Conference that at their stage it would not be opportune to discuss long-term programmes. The Conference congratulated those countries that had been able to draw up such programmes and expressed the hope that other countries would soon be able to do so and that new plans as well as reports on progress in carrying out programmes would be submitted to the next Conference.

4. Co-operation among countries in the preparation and implementation of their programmes occurs under the following aspects:

- (a) Establishment of regional training facilities
- (b) Summer vacation course
- (c) Organization of study tours and seminars
- (d) The regional advisory scheme
- (e) Preparation of programmes of technical assistance
- (f) Sub-regional meetings
- (g) The Statistical Newsletter
- (h) Utilization of the Secretariat's mechanical unit

These are reviewed individually below.

5. In the establishment of regional training facilities

it is necessary to make provision for meeting two separate needs, viz., for professional staff trained at university level and for "middle-grade" sub-professional staff. Regarding the former, a new policy was formulated by the Second Conference of African Statisticians, (report, paragraph 52), as follows:

"The creation in Africa of facilities for the training of professional staff should be one of the major tasks in the field of statistical training in the years to come. So far an increasing number of fellowships for training abroad has been made available to African students. On the other hand, the Conference recommended that the creation of adequate facilities in Africa should be accelerated to meet the increasing demand for professional statisticians."

The Conference went on to recommend that:

- Competition between newly established African training facilities and overseas facilities should be avoided. It is therefore desirable that the fellowships awarded by various national and international agencies to Africans should be, whenever possible, for training in Africa.
- There should be co-ordination between African countries establishing these new facilities, in order to avoid costly duplication.
- The Executive Secretary of ECA should, when necessary, call meetings to achieve such co-ordination.

6. Action to establish facilities for statistical training at university level had already been initiated in consultation with ECA before the Conference, by the Government of Morocco. A training institute has since been opened in Rabat, Morocco, supplying a 2-3 year training course at university level to some forty students. This undertaking, sponsored by the Moroccan Government, received considerable assistance from the United Nations, the latter providing a director of studies for the institute and twenty fellowships for non-Moroccan students. At the Conference, the delegates of Ghana and Senegal reported plans for the creation of University Institutes in the field of statistics, and it is hoped that a programme of UN fellowships will be extended to these also.

In addition, proposals have since been formulated in Rhodesia and Nyasaland for the establishment of a Department of Statistics in the University College of Salisbury and in Uganda for the development of statistics teaching in Makerere College, which is part of the University of East Africa. The ECA Secretariat has participated

in consultations with other bodies interested in this field of work, whether on an international or a bi-lateral basis, for the purpose of channelling aid to these various training enterprises in accordance with the policy recommended by the second Conference of African Statisticians.

7. Concerning training at the middle level, the Secretariat envisages the establishment of a network of sub-regional training centres sponsored by the host governments and the United Nations, the latter operating through ECA, in co-operation with FAO, ILC, WHO and other interested bodies. Two such centres began operating in October, in Accra and Addis Ababa respectively; a third, to serve French-speaking trainees from the countries of Equatorial Africa, is in process of formation in Yaoundé, Cameroun.

The Accra Centre is at present catering for twenty-seven trainees, from four countries, viz. Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The Addis Ababa Centre has started with nineteen trainees, drawn from Ethiopia, Basutoland, Libya, Sudan and the United Arab Republic. In connexion with the curricula of these centres, the second Conference of African Statisticians stressed that, though training should be adapted to local requirements so that certificates awarded would be acceptable to the governments concerned, it was essential to aim as far as possible at regional standardization throughout Africa, particularly in respect of mathematics and statistics. The Conference considered that the ECA Secretariat should be the responsible body for setting the standards in these subjects, in co-operation with governments concerned. Agreement has accordingly been reached with the respective authorities in Ghana and Ethiopia that examination papers in mathematics and statistics taken by the trainees at the Accra and Addis Ababa centres shall be set by the Secretariat. In addition, the Secretariat will arrange, at the request of governments

concerned, for the co-ordination of the curricula of such other statistical training centres as governments establish for national or regional purposes. This has already been undertaken in connexion with a training centre organized by the Government of Ivory Coast at Abidjan. The aim of the Secretariat, in respect of training at the middle level, is that there shall be at least a nucleus of trained staff in every country of the region within the next five years.

8. Summer Vacation Courses. A summer vacation course, catering for university students who were approaching the end of their university studies, was held in Libreville, Gabon, from 21 August to 26 September, 1961, the subject of the course being household surveys. This undertaking was organized jointly by the Governments of France and Gabon and the United Nations, with the co-operation of FAO. Training of an advanced type in the operation of household survey programmes in African conditions was given to twenty-six students from Cameroun, Congo (Brazzaville), Dahomey, France, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Togo and Upper Volta. Most of them were about to enter the service of their countries on completion of university studies. Subjects covered included the organization of surveys of household consumption and expenditure. The course provided an opportunity to review the role of this type of survey as a means of providing data for economic and social planning. It was evident that regular annual courses for students at this level, designed to deal with problems that they would encounter on entering upon their professional duties, would serve a very useful purpose.

9. Organization of Seminars, Study tours, etc.

Three ad hoc projects were undertaken in 1961. The first was a three-months course in population census techniques, held in Accra

from 15 March to 14 June. Plans for this had been made during the second half of 1960, in collaboration with the Government of Ghana and other West African governments. The experience and technical resources developed during the 1960 Population Census of Ghana were utilized to train personnel from neighbouring territories for the planning and operation of censuses and sample surveys in their own countries. Ten participants attended, from Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The course was particularly relevant to these three countries, which are planning to take censuses in the near future in conditions resembling those of Ghana.

The second project was a study tour, organized in co-operation with the Government of Tunisia, which took place immediately after the second Conference of African Statisticians. It lasted for four days and was attended by twenty-two statisticians from fourteen member countries of ECA. Four field surveys were examined.

The third project, also a study tour, was organized in co-operation with the Governments of UAR and Morocco and was held in those two countries from 21 October to 11 November. The subjects of study were the agricultural survey and a labour force survey in UAR and a multi-purpose sample survey in Morocco. Sixteen participants from eight countries attended. They were enabled to make a close examination of the field operations in these three types of survey and available discussions on methods resulted. It is proposed to hold a study tour in West Africa during the course of 1962. This proposal will be considered by a sub-regional meeting of West African statisticians to be held in March, 1962.

10. The Regional Advisory Service. This scheme provides for the establishment of a regional advisory service of eight professionals consisting of three permanent staff members, plus five regional advisers assigned under the UN technical assistance programme. In

addition to the UN advisory staff the Food and Agriculture Organization appointed one regional adviser in agricultural statistics in 1961 and intends to appoint a second one in 1962. It is expected that these advisers will work as a team with the above-mentioned advisory staff. During 1961 one of the permanent staff members was recruited; a second is expected to join in March, 1962. The five regional advisers assigned under the technical assistance programme comprise one demographer, two sampling experts, one expert on national accounts and one expert on public finance statistics. The objective of the regional advisory scheme is to make readily available to African countries a short-term consultative service offering specialized knowledge of demography, sampling methods, national accounts, public finance statistics and agricultural statistics. The difficulty - and consequently the delay - in the recruitment of experts for short-term assignments has hitherto means that African countries requesting short-term technical assistance in some project involving a time factor have often been unable to obtain in within the period when it could be utilized. The regional advisory scheme provides for the supply of such assistance at the time when it is needed. In addition, it is proposed that some of the professionals attached to the advisory service will be permanently assigned to countries of West and Equatorial Africa. Their particular purpose will be to assist those countries in building up their statistical services and developing their programmes.

11. Preparation of programmes of Technical Assistance. The Secretariat's Programme of Work and Priorities, Project 06-01(a) provides for "discussion with countries of technical assistances requirements in relation to national programmes for statistical development, briefing and supervision of experts and fellowships in co-ordination with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at Headquarters". Considerable work in this sphere has already

been carried out by way of incidental service to countries. More is likely to be undertaken in future on account of the Headquarters policy of decentralization, which will involve the Secretariat more specifically in these matters.

12. Sub-regional meetings. The purpose of sub-regional meetings are: (i) to keep statisticians in neighbouring countries sufficiently in contact to ensure that in their more important activities, they do not work in isolation from one another; (ii) to afford opportunities for examining possibilities of co-operation between countries and for working out the details of such co-operation. As requested at the third session of the Commission (report, paragraph 247) summary records of the proceedings of these meetings will be circulated to all African countries. The next series of sub-regional meetings will be in 1962 and will be for the purpose of co-ordinating the training policies of various countries with a view to preventing overlapping, promoting uniform standards and making the most effective use of the facilities available.

13. The Statistical Newsletter. At the time of the third session of the Commission, two issues of the Statistical Newsletter had been published, at an interval of six months. However, it was felt by the Tunis Conference that more frequent publication might be desirable. Accordingly the Newsletter is now published quarterly. The aim is to deal in each issue not only with current developments in African statistics but also with some special topics or special study of more than current interest. The demand for the Newsletter continues to increase, requests being received not only from African sources but from institutions located outside the African continent.

14. The Secretariat's Mechanical Unit. The proposal for the establishment at ECA Headquarters of a mechanical processing unit, which was reported to the third session of the Commission (report, paragraph 109)

has reached the point where the machinery is in process of installation. This unit is to serve the dual purpose of demonstrating mechanical methods and of aiding those countries which lack such mechanical equipment in the performance of special tasks. The first project that will be undertaken with it is the analysis of the data resulting from the 1961 population census of Addis Ababa.

III. FORMULATION OF STATISTICAL METHODS

15. Two working groups concerned with methods and standards were convened by the Secretariat during 1961, both in Addis Ababa. The first of these, was on external trade statistics. The third session of the Commission urged (report, paragraph 248) that "in view of the importance of the subject of international and intra-African trade the attention of the second Conference of African Statisticians and of the statistical offices of all African countries should be directed to improving the standards of comparability of African trade statistics and organizing an improved service of trade statistics to the Secretariat". In this connexion the second Conference of African Statisticians recommended that a working group of experts be convened in 1961. Accordingly two statisticians of the Secretariat visited, during the second half of 1961, a number of African countries where problems of comparability arise, in order to discuss the position and to draw up a provisional programme for a working group attended by thirty-two experts. The report is circulated to the session as document E/CN.14/120.

16. The second working group of 1961 was on household surveys and was held from 11 to 20 December. Inspection of the programmes of statistical development submitted by countries to the second Conference of African Statisticians shows that household surveys and agricultural surveys are the forthcoming activities that are most frequently mentioned. In particular, rural household surveys will be utilized for

the collection of data of economic importance in the rural sphere, e.g. production, consumption, capital formation, availability of special skills, etc.. It is the Secretariat's desire to encourage of systematic approach to this field of work, which is of very great importance in countries where the rural sector is the largest sector of the economy. The working group was attended by sixteen experts. Their report is circulated to the session as document E/CN.14/130. The Secretariat plans to publish, for the use of African countries, a manual of household surveys embodying the methodology recommended in this report.

17. At the request of the second Conference of African Statisticians, six further working groups are included in the programme of work for 1962-63. Two, to be held in 1962, will deal with industrial statistics and the adaptation of the United Nations standardized system of national accounts for use in Africa. Two in 1963 will deal with capital formation and balance of payments. In addition it is expected that, under the auspices of the Conference of African Statisticians, FAO and the ECA Secretariat will service two meetings, one in 1962 on agricultural statistics and the other in 1963 on consumption surveys. The statistical staff of the Secretariat will also participate in a seminar on population problems, to be held in 1962.

IV. PUBLICATION OF STATISTICAL SERIES

18. During 1961 the Secretariat continued to compile and analyse statistical data for the Economic Bulletin for Africa. The resulting tables are now published as a supplement to the Economic Bulletin, under the title of "African Statistics." Improvement in the flow of data from countries has enabled the Secretariat to improve the coverage of these tables, though lack of comparability between national data based on different systems continues to set limits to

what can be done in this direction.

19. In view of the importance of external trade statistics, the Secretariat presented to the second Conference of African Statisticians a programme of collections processing and publication of African trade statistics, to be carried out in co-operation with member governments and interested United Nations agencies by means of the mechanical unit now being installed at ECA headquarters. This programme was approved by the Conference. It involves the submission by countries of relevant data in forms suitable for conversion into uniform nomenclatures, units and geographical classification.

20. The Secretariat proposes to process these data, after conversion, in a manner that will yield two statistical series. The first of these, to be published ultimately every two months, is intended to give as quickly as possible an indication of the trends of the main intra-African trade flows and of trade between African countries and the rest of the world. It is to be based on monthly country reports showing the breakdowns of total value of imports by origin and destination. The second series, which it is proposed to publish on a bi-annual basis as a start, is intended to throw light on the structural changes in African trade, the analysis being according to the sections, divisions and groups of the SITC (Revised). It will also contain quantum and price indices for exports computed on the basis of data for the most important African export products. Consideration will be given later to the much more complicated problem of computing indices for African imports. Each issue of the series will comprise a number of bulletins, each of which will contain data for a group of three or four African countries. It is also proposed to produce a handbook giving retrospective data for the period 1950-59.

21. In addition to the above programme, the Secretariat proposes to produce three handbooks; one on population, one on national accounts and (in co-operation with FAO) one on agricultural statistics. The first of these is expected to be published in 1962, the second has recently been started after much preliminary investigations, the third will be undertaken in co-operation with FAO if resources permit.

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