

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



1963
Distr.
LIMITED



E/CN.14/CAS.3/14
19 September 1963

ENGLISH
Original : FRENCH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
Third Conference of African Statisticians
Addis Ababa, 2-11 October 1963

RELATIONS BETWEEN PLANNING BODIES
AND STATISTICS

63-3318

RELATIONS BETWEEN PLANNING BODIES
AND STATISTICS

1. Statistical development in Africa has been defined by the first two Conferences of African Statisticians as the adaptation of the statistical apparatus to the requirements of development and planning. After four years of work and research on the methods of adapting this statistical apparatus, both in the African countries individually and in ECA working parties collectively, it seems worth while to retrace in this memorandum the way that has been followed. As will be seen, a considerable amount of relevant experience is now available on the African continent.
2. Enormous wastage has been incurred in the past in the use of development credits, for want of an adequate statistical instrument: it will be possible to reduce this if planning techniques are improved through present and future statistical development. One of the main functions of the Third Conference of African Statisticians, to be held under the auspices of ECA, will be to set the African countries even more firmly than in the past on the way that has been mapped out.
3. In the following pages, the relations between planning bodies and statistics in Africa is reviewed in the light of the experience gained during the past few years. The discussion is then extended, in respect to programming statistical development, in another paper submitted to the Conference as Document E/CN.14/CAS.3/9.
4. The theme of the relations between planning bodies and statistics has been referred to in the past by many ECA working-parties. We will mention in particular the Working Group on the Uses of National Accounts, in January 1961; the Second Conference of African Statisticians, in June 1961; the Working Party on Economic and Social Development, in January 1962; and above all the Working Group on National Accounts, in September 1962, and the Expert Group on Comprehensive Development Planning, in October 1962, whose reports were submitted to the fifth session of ECA under the numbers E/CN.14/221 and E/CN.14/182, and are available for the Conference.

5. Discussions on the subject are always lively, for many African countries are in search of a means of association between planning and statistics: nobody questions the need of a close association, but there are difficulties to surmount.

6. In the first place, the Planning Service is always in a hurry for data, especially when plans are being drawn up. It must, however, be recognized that many statistical data are worked out only after prolonged effort. Thus, it takes two or three years to have ready the results of a population census, the king-pin in the preparation of a plan. This example could be multiplied; in many countries little or nothing is known of the structures of income, consumption, and savings; yet the aim or effect of planning is often to mobilize savings, modify consumption, or establish a fiscal policy. In the same way, questions like that of the benefits to be expected from establishing agricultural advisory services are very difficult to answer without a minimum of objective knowledge on agricultural man-power, the distribution of crops, yields, and so on, all of which information demands a long and costly series of agricultural surveys.

7. Must the preparation of the plan, then, await the completion of the most important statistical survey? This would be absurd; for it would mean a loss of valuable time for many development projects that are known to be useful even if their influence on the general economy of the country cannot be measured. Planning techniques and statistical development must still, however, be reconciled, and important recommendations that are gradually emerging on this point will be listed below.

8. Firstly, if the needs are considered at the present moment of a planning body that has to prepare a development plan within a given time, it is certain that the study and research office of this body must be able to obtain a number of figures from the statistician. When no objective survey has been carried out in a particular sphere, the statistician will often have to give the planner the best possible

estimate, however rough it may be, rather than a blank refusal. For his part, the planner must keep in mind the state of statistical development, and be able to limit his demands to what can reasonably be stated in figures, here there come on the scene two categories of experts who are rare for the moment, not only in Africa, but in the whole world: on the one hand, the statistician-economist who can make use of anything, borrowing if necessary from neighbouring countries the technical coefficients that he lacks, such as rate of growth of population and capital-output ratio in a given sector; and on the other hand, the planner who is able to adapt his techniques to the degree of statistical development.

9. Secondly, if the next three or the next ten years are viewed in a dynamic perspective, it is essential to include in each balance-sheet of the development plan the necessary credits for improving the statistical information to be used in the preparation of the following plan. To put it simply, it can be said that at present it is for the planner to adapt his planning techniques to the present state of the statistical apparatus, but in the long run, it is for the statistical apparatus to become adapted to more elaborate planning techniques. To recognize this is to admit that the statistical apparatus is slow in starting, and that a considerable part of the statistical programme consists in working for the future Director of Planning, and not for the present holder of the post. This supposes a certain autonomy in the Statistical Service, which has its own working rhythm different in some respects from that of the planner; but at the same time, the statistician must know enough of planning techniques to be able to guide his activities in the right direction.

10. The same problem of reconciling in the statistician a degree of interdependence with a degree of independence is found again when statistics is employed, not for the preparation of the plan, but for the supervision of its carrying out. The question is one of entrusting to the statistician not the administrative function of supervision,

but the responsibility of measuring the effects of the development plan in one sector, for example agriculture, or in the economy as a whole. Here again, the points of view of the planner and the statistician may not coincide; and although the survey programme intended to measure the effect of the plan may have to be drawn up by them jointly, it is logical to leave the statistician enough independence to carry it through with complete objectivity.

11. A number of suggestions arise during the course of the preceding argument, both on the administrative organization of planning and statistics and on the programmes of the relevant bodies. They can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Although the experts are not unanimous on the point, it seems that the question of whether a planner should attempt to apply overall programming techniques even when statistical data are lacking is badly stated. In fact, there is always some lack of statistical data, the difference in situation from country to country is a question of degree, and the true problem, which is much more difficult and calls for more research, is how to adapt overall programming techniques to different degrees of statistical development. This type of research is among those which should be undertaken by the Institut africain de développement économique et de planification (African Institute for Economic Development and Planning).
- (b) During the preparation of the plans, the planning services require national accountants and statistician-economists capable of presenting all the necessary data with the least possible delay. The latter must work hand in hand with planners and be able to make the best use of all the available data, even those that are doubtful. Here again, although there is not unanimity on the point, it seems that many African countries prefer to include these statistician-economists in the planning team itself and not in the

statistical service. We must welcome in passing the establishment of centres for training these statisticians (see document E/CN.14/CAS.3/15).

- (c) ECA would perform a very useful service by seeking out and publishing, preferably in all the countries of Africa, the technical coefficients that would allow numerous planners to make use of data collected in other countries. The Second Conference of African Statisticians made a recommendation to this effect (Report, paragraph 89). Naturally the procedure is dangerous, but a first exercise in planning, even if it is rough or incomplete, is better than nothing at all, provided the necessary caution is observed.
- (d) It must be admitted that planning is not an exercise that is carried out once for all, but a continual and progressive effort that is improved every time a new plan is prepared. In this dynamic perspective it is logical to include in each period of the plan the credits necessary to improving the statistical apparatus that will serve in the adoption of the following plan.
- (e) The Statistical Service must therefore devote a considerable part of its activities to preparing the future of planning, and for that reason it must be given the necessary autonomy in the adoption of its programmes. This is especially important in connexion with the establishment of a permanent survey section within the statistical service.
- (f) It is also necessary to preserve the independence of the Statistical Service within the administrative organization when the former is responsible for measuring, through surveys, the effects of the development plan on the economy of the country.