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MATTERS ARISING FROM THE TENTH SESSION OF
THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

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THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

The tenth session of the Economic Commission for Africa, which was also the first meeting of the Conference of Ministers, met in Tunis from 8 to 13 February 1971. It was preceded by the second meeting of the Technical Committee of Experts from 1 to 6 February.

2. A full account of the material submitted to these meetings, together with information on discussions, resolutions work programme, etc. is given in the ECA Annual Report to the Economic and Social Council for the period 15 February 1970 to 13 February 1971, E/CN.14/519. In this note, the essential points relating to statistical activities are reproduced for ease of reference.

WORK OF THE COMMISSION SINCE 15 FEBRUARY 1970

3. The following extract is taken from the report on the activities of the Commission:

Statistical services

4. During the period under review, work on the statistical programme was maintained in the light of its two basic objectives which are: (a) assistance in the development and co-ordination of national statistical services; and (b) establishment of a centralized statistical service for the African region. The Conference of African Statisticians, which is responsible for the formulation of the programme, met in October 1969 and its next biennial session will be convened in October 1971.

5. Assistance in developing national statistical services - and those of multinational groupings - involves three interrelated programmes: training of African statisticians, provision of statistical advisory services, and application of standard methodology appropriate to the conditions of the region.

Training of African statisticians

6. Efforts to develop professional-level statistical training in the region continued to be concentrated on the two Institutes of Statistics and Applied Economics at Rabat, Morocco, and Kampala, Uganda, which are assisted by the UNDP (Special Fund). There were 198 enrolments for professional courses in these two Institutes during the 1968/69 academic year. A further important contribution to professional training was made by national centres, including the School of Statistics at Abidjan which provides an international service.

7. Middle-level training was maintained, and it is notable that two of the centres originally co-sponsored by the United Nations continued to meet heavy demands. These were the Statistics Training Institute at Yaoundé, Cameroun, which is now assisted by UNDP (Special Fund), and the East African Statistical Training Centre at Dar-es-Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, which has been transferred to the technical assistance programme of the East African Community.

Advisory services and other country assignments

8. The secretariat continued to provide statistical advisory services to countries in the region. During 1970/71 four advisers undertook 47 missions in the fields of national accounts, demographic statistics and sample surveys.

9. The work of the statistical advisers was supplemented by staff members who undertook additional country visits in connexion with general economic statistics, industrial statistics, price comparison studies and national accounts. Current demand indicates that there is an urgent need to strengthen the advisory service in national accounts and to provide an expert in data processing.

Application of standard methodology

10. In the application of standard methodology within the region, national accounts continued to be one of the primary considerations, particularly in view of the revised international recommendations in this field. A Seminar on the Revised United Nations System of National Accounts, organized in co-operation with the Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics, was held at Kampala, Uganda, from 13 September to 4 October. It was attended by 19 participants from 15 countries and proved an effective means of initiating statisticians in the intricacies of the system. The seminar was for English-speaking participants only, and a similar project will be organized for the French-language group at the Rabat Institute during the second quarter of 1971.

11. A Seminar on Data Required for Projections was held at Addis Ababa from 9 to 13 November. Its objects were to clarify data needs and uses in national planning and in analysing the regional economic situation, particularly with respect to the applications of national accounts for these purposes. The meeting was organized as a joint statistics and economic research project and was attended by both national statisticians and planners. It was followed by a Working Group on Public Sector Statistics, which met in Addis Ababa, from 16 to 20 November. One of the main objects of this project was to promote the standardization of government accounts within the context of the national accounting framework.

12. In addition to the routine work of compiling national accounts and other statistical material, some progress was made in establishing complete annual series for a number of basic variables for each country in the region. This work, which involves the use of estimation procedures, was undertaken because reasonably comprehensive data proved necessary for various ECA projects, particularly the annual economic surveys. Further series are now being prepared and figures are being deflated to a constant price basis so as to provide a more comprehensive system of data for analytical purposes.

13. During the earlier part of 1970, some of the secretariat's work on demographic and social statistics was suspended as a result of staff transfers to the new Population Programme Centre. Activities were resumed in October when temporary staff arrangements were made, and efforts to recruit more permanent demographic statisticians are continuing.

Publications and studies

14. The compilation of a Manual on Demographic Sample Surveys has made good progress and the draft is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 1971; it will be considered by the Conference of African Statisticians at its seventh session which is scheduled for October 1971. Work has also continued on a Manual on Household Economic Surveys which is due for completion later in 1971. These manuals will incorporate the essential aspects of African survey experience during recent years.

The following regular publications have been maintained:

Quarterly:

Statistical Newsletter
Statistical Bulletin for Africa
Foreign Trade Statistics for Africa, Series A: Direction of trade.

Half-yearly:

Foreign Trade Statistics for Africa, Series B: Trade by commodity and by country.

15. The first issue of the African Statistical Yearbook was published at the end of 1970. It incorporates the previous document entitled Yearly Statistics of Industrial Production and a national accounts publication proposed some time ago, together with available data on agriculture, trade, etc. The Yearbook is regarded as a project of special importance because, at the regional level, interest lies mainly in annual figures. Efforts to improve this publication will continue and it is likely that there will be changes in its content and presentation in the course of the next few years.

16. Included in the work programme are a number of statistical studies, each of which is intended to improve the information in a specific field by making use of data from all available sources. During 1970 attention was given to a study of the purchasing power parity of African currencies which is linked with a similar project at world level. Two other projects scheduled for the period under review were studies of the pattern of private consumption expenditure and of the structure and importance of non-monetary activities. In both cases progress has been made in compiling basic material. A preliminary report on the structure of the public sector in African countries was presented to the Working Group on Public Sector Statistics in November.

17. The installation of a larger computer, which was referred to in the previous annual report, has not yet been approved and the secretariat's capacity for data processing and analysis therefore remains limited. Efforts are being made to reduce the effects of this difficulty by introducing more systematic input procedures, but the amount of data that can be handled will be somewhat restricted, and the transfer of data between the ECA computer and other installations will remain difficult so long as the secretariat does not have the necessary tape facilities.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

18. The Commission's decision regarding future arrangements for the Conference of African Statisticians is indicated below:

19. Following consideration of the draft resolution concerning the institutional machinery of the Commission, the Conference decided:

- (a) That the working parties established under resolution 128(VII) should be abolished, but that the Conference of African Planners, the Conference of African Statisticians and the Conference of African demographers should be retained;
- (b) That sub-committees of the Technical Committee of Experts should be established on which member States would be represented in the various fields, so as to enable the Committee to deal effectively with the questions coming within its competence;
- (c) That as far as the reports of the Technical Committee of Experts to the Conference of Ministers were concerned, the Executive Committee should meet in time to give its views on those reports to the Conference;
- (d) That the membership of the Executive Committee should be increased to sixteen;

- (e) That the right of the Executive Committee to elect its own officers should be recognized, inasmuch as the only restriction imposed by resolution 188(IX) on this right relates to the chairmanship, which must be held by the Chairman of the Conference of Ministers;
- (f) That the member States should, as far as possible, be represented at meetings of the Executive Committee by Ministers.

RESOLUTIONS AND OTHER DECISIONS ADOPTED BY THE
CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS AT ITS FIRST MEETING

20. The resolution on statistics which is reproduced below is examined in more detail in the paper entitled Preparation and Distribution of African Statistics, E/CN.14/CAS.7/7:

231(X). Statistics

The Conference of Ministers

Noting with appreciation the work carried out by the United Nations in developing the United Nations System of National Accounts and other statistical systems as a basis for the organization of statistical programmes and economic analyses,

Mindful of the urgent need for comprehensive and timely statistical information in planning development efforts at national and multi-national levels,

1. Urges African Governments to take all steps necessary for the introduction of these systems without delay;

2. Requests the Executive Secretary to arrange for countries to receive the assistance needed in applying internationally recommended statistical systems and in identifying and remedying the principal statistical deficiencies which exist at the present time;

3. Further requests the Executive Secretary to give all possible assistance in the training of data processing staff at all levels;

4. Recommends that Governments should give urgent attention to the problem of achieving speedier publication of statistical information;

5. Further recommends that Governments should undertake the preparation and publication of provisional estimates of key national accounts aggregates at the end of each year.

21. Also reproduced here is the resolution on economic research and planning which deals with the improvement of economic surveys:

220(X). Economic research and planning

The Conference of Ministers

Mindful of the need to ensure that African countries attain the larger growth rates laid down for the Second United Nations Development Decade, 1/

Noting that up-to-date economic surveys of the region, the sub-regions and individual countries are essential for maintaining continuous study of economic developments, identifying growth points and indicating factors which are holding up growth,

Recognising the need to prepare medium-term development plans as a means of ensuring a steady and continuous growth,

1. Recommends that Governments of member States should continue to establish an effective planning machinery;
2. Urges all member States to improve their practices in presenting economic data and in preparing and modifying development plans;
3. Further recommends that some government agency in countries which do not prepare such surveys should be given the responsibility for preparing and publishing an annual economic survey;
4. Requests the Executive Secretary to continue to render all assistance possible in the fields of planning and economic surveys, especially in training economic planners, economic analysts, etc.;
5. Further requests the Executive Secretary to continue to improve the content of the annual Economic Survey of the region and to prepare Summaries of Data for individual countries of Africa on an annual basis.

163rd meeting
13 February 1971

1/ See General Assembly resolution 2626(XXV) of 24 October 1970.

PROGRAMME OF WORK AND PRIORITIES 1971-1973
WITH PROJECTIONS TO 1976

22. The verbal report and discussion on statistical activities is summarised in the following extract:

Statistics

The basic objective of the Commission's statistical programme had always been the development and co-ordination of African statistical services. During more recent years it had also become apparent that there was a need for a centralized statistical service for the African region. These aims had shaped the two main projects in the statistical programme.

The activities included under the heading of development and co-ordination of African statistical services were: statistical advisory services, the biennial meetings of the Conference of African Statisticians, statistical training and the application of standard statistical methodology. The latter entailed methodological studies and technical meetings.

The second main item in the programme was the establishment of a centralized statistical service for the African region responsible for undertaking statistical studies and collecting and disseminating information. Recent and current work included participation in a world study on purchasing power parities, a methodological study into the valuation of agricultural commodities, as well as studies on the pattern of private consumption expenditure, the structure of the public sector, and non-monetary activities.

The secretariat continued to publish the Statistical Newsletter, the Quarterly Statistical Bulletin, and two series on Foreign Trade Statistics. The first issue of a new Statistical Yearbook for Africa had just been completed.

The structure of the work programme for 1971-1976 was unchanged. The question of the adoption by countries of the United Nations System of National Accounts was considered as a matter of priority because it provided an improved basis for the organization of national statistical programmes and a more satisfactory framework for economic analysis.

However, if the programme was to prove really effective, there were a number of practical matters in which the active co-operation of the countries was essential; specifically they should speed up the preparation and dissemination of their regional statistical publications, which should be more comprehensive and detailed. Moreover, there were gaps in the statistical information available on the African countries, and particularly on balance of payments, income distribution, the output of public services and activities of the rural sector.

The meeting supported the secretariat's request for speedier circulation of statistical data within the region and also agreed that an attempt should be made to provide provisional estimates of the principal national accounts aggregates as soon as possible after the end of each year.

In reply to a question on the steps being taken by the secretariat to help solve the problem of distortions introduced into international comparison of national accounts aggregates by the use of a common currency unit such as the U.S. dollar, the secretariat reported that it has been participating in the international comparison study of purchasing power parities organized by United Nations Headquarters. This project is now being extended to cover the African region in more detail and questionnaires for this purpose will be issued shortly. It was noted that the secretariat will give all help necessary in problems of price collection arising from this project.

It was further indicated that assistance will be needed by countries in applying the Revised United Nations System of National Accounts. It was reported that the secretariat is already actively engaged in this work. During the past year some 15 countries have received individual assistance through regional advisory services, and participants from nearly 20 countries attended an intensive training seminar on the application of the new system organized in co-operation with the Statistical Institute at Kampala. A similar project for the French language group will take place in 1971. Arrangements for assistance include not only methodology needed in applying the system but also provision for transition periods to insure continuity between previous and new series of estimates.

Attention was drawn to the need for adapting national accounts aggregates used in planning to the conditions of the region. The world publication on the new system already gives considerable attention to this question particularly with respect to problems arising from dual economics and non-monetary transactions.

In reply to a further question it was indicated that the study on the application of the new system of accounts had been delayed until 1974 to enable concentration on training and technical assistance activities in the immediate future. It was suggested that the secretariat should prepare an African National Accounts Manual, and it was agreed that this could be done in co-operation with the United Nations Statistical Office.

The increasing attention now being given to statistical training at the graduate and post-graduate levels was noted with satisfaction. It was also reported that the middle level training programme which has been in operation for nearly ten years will be maintained while the demand for facilities at this level persists.

Attention was drawn to the need for training data processing personnel in view of the large number of countries now using computers. It was indicated that ECA has provision for assisting in this respect as well as undertaking data processing on a service basis. However the amount of assistance that can be given is limited by the nature of the secretariat's equipment and shortage of staff.

It was pointed out that OCAM intends to establish a computer processing and training centre in Gabon for which financial and technical assistance will be needed. The secretariat indicated that it will be pleased to assist in preliminary investigation of this project and will also participate in the teaching programme after the centre is established.

23. The content of the statistical programme approved by the Commission for the period 1971-1976 is given below. Some considerations regarding possible amendments to this are given in the Report on ECA Statistical Activities 1969-1971 and Future Work Programme, E/CN.14/CAS.7/11.

STATISTICS DIVISION

A. BROAD ISSUES AND TECHNIQUES RELATING TO DEVELOPMENT

12A:1 Development of national and multinational statistical services

Origin:

Commission terms of reference, Commission resolutions 18(II) and 59(IV).

Project aim:

Development and co-ordination of national statistical services to meet the growing needs of administration, policy formulation and planning for economic and social development.

Priority A

Work content:

(a) Assistance to governments (1971-1976):

Provision, on request, of regional advisory services in demographic statistics, economic statistics, statistical organisation, national accounts, sample surveys and data processing.

(c) Conferences, meetings, seminars and expert working groups (1971-1976):

Preparation of documentation and provision of servicing facilities for the seventh (1971); eight (1973) and ninth (1975) sessions of the Conference of African Statisticians.

Related programmes:

Collaboration with the UN Statistical Office and OTC in determining the statistical technical assistance requirements of member States and in briefing country experts.

12A:1(a) Statistical training

Origin:

Commission terms of reference; Commission resolutions 18(II) and 146(VII).

Project aim:

To intensify personnel training programmes particularly at the graduate and post-graduate levels.

Priority A

Work content:

(a) Assistance to governments (1971-1976):

Maintenance of support to existing national and regional training centres at middle and professional levels through participation in their training programmes, and provision of advisory services in relation to curriculum development.

Related programmes:

Statistical training activities are conducted in collaboration with the UN Statistical Office and OTC both administratively responsible for the regional statistical centres. Collaboration is maintained with UNESCO, other specialized agencies, the ECA Human Resources Development Division and governments.

12A:1(b) Application of standard statistical methodology

Origin:

Commission terms of reference and reports of Conference of African Statisticians.

Project aim:

Standardization of methodology and efficient and systematic collection and publication of data throughout the region.

Priority A

Work content:

(b) Studies:

Methodological studies and manuals (1971-1976):

National accounts:

- (i) Study on the application of the revised United Nations system of national accounts in African countries (1974);
- (ii) Preparation of an African National Accounts Manual (1974).
General economic statistics:
 - (iii) Manual on household economic surveys (1970-1971);
Demographic and social statistics:
 - (iv) Study on the methods and problems of African population censuses and surveys, 1964-1970 (1971);
 - (v) Study on the collection of data on economic characteristics in African censuses (1972-1973);
 - (vi) Study on the enumeration of nomadic populations (1973-1974);
 - (vii) Manual on vital statistics and civil registration (1973-1974);
 - (viii) Study of migration statistics (1974-1975).
- (d) Conferences, meetings, seminars and expert working groups (1971-1976);
National accounts:
 - (i) Working group on production accounts, commodity balances and input-output analysis both at current and constant prices (1971);
 - (ii) Training course on the revised system of national accounts (Rabat) (1971);
 - (iii) Working group on household sector statistics (1972);
 - (iv) Seminar on external transactions (1972);
 - (v) Seminar on the revised United Nations system of national accounts (1973);
 - (vi) Working group on income and financial transactions of enterprises (1974);
 - (vii) Working group on manpower, demographic and social statistics (1974);
 - (viii) Working group on evaluation of stocks of fixed capital (1975);

- (ix) Second African seminar on price and quantity statistics (1976);
 - (x) Seminar on the treatment of the services sector in national accounts (1976);
- General economic statistics:
- (xi) Seminar on foreign trade statistics (1971);
 - (xii) Seminar on the preparation of the 1973 world programme of industrial statistics (Rabat) (1972)
 - (xiii) Seminar on the preparation of the 1973 world programme of industrial statistics (Kampala) (1972);
 - (xiv) Working group on transport statistics (1973);
 - (xv) Seminar on the use of electronic data processing equipment in statistics (1974);
 - (xvi) Working group on improvement of trade and distribution statistics (1976);
- Demographic and social statistics:
- (xvii) Second African seminar on civil registration and vital statistics (1972);
 - (xviii) Working group on evaluation of the 1970 world population census programme in African countries (1974);
 - (xix) Working group on requirements in the field of social statistics (1974).

Related programmes:

The work is carried out in close collaboration with the UN Statistical Office. UN specialized agencies, ECA Divisions and non-African governments are invited to participate in projects as appropriate.

12A:2 Development of a regional statistical service

Origin:

Commission terms of reference and reports of the Conference of African Statisticians.

Project aim:

To develop a regional framework of statistical information, supported by detailed studies to provide a reasonably comprehensive account of the African economic and social situation.

Priority A

Work content:

(b) Statistical studies (1971-1976):

National accounts:

- (i) Purchasing power parity of African currencies (1969-1975) - in collaboration with 18A:4(b);
 - (ii) Pattern of private consumption expenditure (1969-1973) and (1974-1976);
 - (iii) Structure and importance of non-monetary activities (1969-1973);
 - (iv) Structure of the public sector (1969-1971) and (1976-1978);
 - (v) Structure and change in capital formation between 1960 and 1970 (1970-1972);
 - (vi) Growth of capital budgets between 1960 and 1970 (1972-1974)
 - (vii) Price movements by type of economic activity during the period 1960 to 1970 in relation to similar movements in other regions (1973-1976);
 - (viii) Public debt of African countries (1974-1975);
 - (ix) Level of taxation (1974-1975) - in collaboration with 18A:1;
 - (x) Financing of public sector investments (1975-1977);
- General economic statistics - in collaboration with 3A:2 and 3A:3;
- (xi) Changes in the terms of trade (1973-1976) - in collaboration with 3A:2 and 3A:3;
 - (xii) Food balance sheets (1974) - in collaboration with 16A:2;
 - (xiii) African industrial censuses undertaken in connection with the 1973 world programme of industrial statistics (1974-1975);

- (xiv) Balance of payments of African countries (1974) - in collaboration with 3A:2 and 3A:3;
 - (xv) Retail trade and distribution (1975);
 - (xvi) Analysis of household budget surveys completed during the last fifteen years (1975-1976);
 - (xvii) Building statistics (1976);
Demographic and social statistics:
 - (xviii) Evaluation of the precision of estimated vital rates for African countries (1971);
 - (xix) Sampling errors in African population census and survey data (1971-1972).
- (c) Collection and dissemination of information (1971-1976):

Quarterly publications:

- (i) Statistical Newsletter;
- (ii) Quarterly Statistical Bulletin for Africa;
- (iii) Foreign trade statistics of Africa, series A:

Direction of trade:

Half-yearly publication:

- (iv) Foreign trade statistics of Africa, series B:

Trade by commodity and by country;

Annual publication:

- (v) African Statistical Yearbook;

Occasional publications (revised when necessary):

- (vi) Bibliography of African statistical publications;
- (vii) Directory of African Statisticians.

Related programmes:

As noted under the projects concerned, a number of statistical studies will be carried out in co-operation with other ECA Divisions and in some cases the work will involve UN specialized agencies. The Statistics Division will continue to provide specialized data and processing services and will (within limits) undertake processing for member States on request.