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### Items for information: statistical capacity-building

## Statistical capacity-building

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/220 and past practices, provides an overview of the recent activities undertaken by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in support of the efforts of countries to strengthen their national statistical capacity so as to better respond to the data challenges under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The report also provides information on the new forms of collaborative efforts for synchronizing initiatives and leveraging partnerships and coordination in the area of statistical capacity-building; and also includes information on the conclusions and recommendations of the just-concluded evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection in support of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of this report.

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\* E/CN.3/2017/1.



## Statistical capacity-building

### I. Introduction

1. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup> brought increased attention on the part of the international community to the need to strengthen the statistical capacity of developing countries to measure, monitor and report on the Sustainable Development Goals, including the associated targets and indicators. Goal 17 specifically addresses strengthening the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with the goal of target 17.18 being: By 2020, to enhance capacity-building support to developing countries to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographical location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

2. The global indicator framework for the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets presents a tremendous challenge to producers of official statistics in all countries, developing and developed alike. Countries must fulfil the new data demands that have been placed upon them, including quickly defining national targets and indicators, if they are to implement the 2030 Agenda. They will need to develop and adapt their national statistical systems to respond to those demands, and to put in place streamlined processes to ensure the timely production of official statistics. Countries will also be exposed to methodologies and tools that are being developed at the global level to measure the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets, particularly in new statistical areas. This being the case, the development and strengthening of institutional and technical capacities in developing countries for the production of high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data, which are in line with international standards and respect the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and which can assist policymakers in shaping evidence-based policies which fully integrate economic, social and environmental considerations, have become critical.

3. During the period 2015-2016, the capacity-building efforts of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat focused on two key areas: (a) strengthening national statistical capacities to measure, monitor, assess and report on progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and (b) enhancing modernization of national statistical systems, taking into account the recommendations of the Statistical Commission on the data revolution and the use of new technologies and big data for official statistics, including the use of geospatial information and its integration with statistical data. Within the area of geospatial information management, the Statistics Division

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution [70/1](#).

further advanced the development and use of geospatial data and tools to support the sustainable development and related global agendas.<sup>2</sup>

4. The present report provides an overview of the capacity-building activities undertaken by the Statistics Division as part of its Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation as well as recent and ongoing Development Account and donor-funded projects. Additional details on the Division's capacity-building initiatives in specific substantive areas such as national accounts, trade and tourism statistics, and demographic and social statistics are provided in reports submitted to the Statistical Commission. This report also provides information on the new forms of collaborative efforts for synchronizing initiatives and leveraging partnerships and coordination in the area of statistical capacity-building; and also includes information on the conclusions and recommendations of the just-concluded evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection in support of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals.

## II. Implementation of the capacity-building programme in the period 2015-2016

5. In the period 2015-2016, the Statistics Division organized 53 workshops and seminars and 25 expert group meetings, at which a total of 5,308 professionals shared experiences and received training (see table 1). A total of 177 individual fellowships had been awarded to national statisticians and geospatial information experts from developing countries to enable them to attend 44 regional and international meetings.

Table 1  
Number of events and participants, 2015 and 2016

Year	<i>Workshops and seminars</i>		<i>Expert group meetings</i>		<i>Study visits</i>	
	<i>Number of events</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Number of events</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Number of events</i>	<i>Participants</i>
2015	25	1 420	10	823	21	67
2016	28	1 914	15	1 151	23	110
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>3 334</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>1 974</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>177</b>

6. In table 2, the themes of the events held are broken down into five broad categories, namely (a) demographic and social statistics; (b) economic statistics, such as international trade, economic globalization, tourism, energy and industrial

<sup>2</sup> See also the following Statistical Commission documents: report of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (E/CN.3/2017/3), the report of the Secretary-General on the transformative agenda for official statistics (E/CN.3/2017/5), the report of the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics (E/CN.3/2017/7) and the report of the Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information (E/CN.3/2017/10).

statistics, in relation to national accounts; (c) environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting; (d) statistics as related to Sustainable Development Goal indicators; and (e) geospatial information management.

Table 2  
Number of workshops, expert group meetings and seminars, by theme

Year	Demographic and social statistics	Economic statistics, including international trade, economic globalization, tourism, energy and industrial statistics, in relation to national accounts	Environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting	Statistics as related to Sustainable Development Goal indicators	Geospatial information management
2015	6	6	10	8	5
2016	11	6	9	13	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>

### A. Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation

7. The Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation (RPTC),<sup>3</sup> supports developing countries in their capacity-building efforts geared towards achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals, and the outcomes of United Nations conferences and summits. The capacity-building activities of the Statistics Division under the Regular Programme draw substantively from the normative work of the Statistical Commission and respond to the policy guidance and programmes of action agreed at the sessions of the Commission.

8. In the period 2015-2016, following the outcomes of the dialogue on development indicators and the adoption by the Statistical Commission of the relevant international statistical standards, the Statistics Division's capacity-building efforts focused on two key areas: (a) strengthening the national statistical capacities to measure, monitor, assess and report on progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through the use of indicators; and (b) enhancing modernization of national statistical systems, taking into account the recommendations of the Commission on the data revolution and the use of new technologies and big data for official statistics, including geospatial information and its integration with statistical data. In the area of geospatial information management, the Division aimed at further advancing the development and use of geospatial data and tools to support the sustainable development and related global agendas.

9. The most common capacity-building activities funded by the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation programme have been (a) organization of regional and subregional training workshops and seminars by the Statistics Division alone or in partnership with the regional commissions and other international and regional partner organizations and specialized agencies; (b) provision of advisory services by the Division's four interregional advisers in the areas of census-taking,

<sup>3</sup> Established by the General Assembly in its resolution 58 (I) of 14 December 1946.

geospatial information management, statistical training and capacity-building and organization of the national statistical systems, and by short-term experts, both staff members and consultants, as resource persons and trainers; and (c) provision of fellowships, short-term training sessions, study tours and on-the-job training for national statisticians and national geospatial information experts from developing countries to enable them to upgrade and strengthen their knowledge and skills in the areas of statistics and geographical information management and to establish regional and international networks.

10. Seventeen workshops and events involving 76 recipients of the individual fellowships (see table 1) were organized under the Regular Programme of the Statistics Division in the period 2015-2016.

11. Developing countries in almost every region received support and training on the implementation of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*,<sup>4</sup> adopted by the Statistical Commission in 2014. Seven workshops aimed at promoting the revised set of contemporary standards for civil registration and vital statistics were organized: in Azerbaijan (May 2015), Turkey (September 2015), Chile (November 2015), Trinidad and Tobago (December 2015), New Caledonia (February 2016), Guatemala (August 2016) and Oman (November 2016). Those workshops, which brought together a civil registrar and an official statistician from each country, covered over 100 countries — countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean and the Arabic-speaking countries — thereby ensuring that over 200 participants had the opportunity to grasp the intricacies of the revised methodological framework for civil registration and vital statistics.

12. As part of the implementation programme for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA), three pilot training-of-trainers workshops were organized on the SEEA Central Framework: in Ethiopia (February 2015), Chile (July 2015) and Japan (February 2016). The training programme, which followed a blended-learning format, consisted of three phases: mandatory online training, an in-person workshop and a follow-up phase scheduled following the week during which the in-person workshop was held. The follow-up phase, during which trainers conducted national seminars on SEEA in order to build a foundation for the implementation of other projects on environmental-economic and ecosystem accounts, was an important component of the training of trainers.

13. In 2015-2016, through the Regular Programme, the Statistics Division built national capacities for the implementation of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES 2013). The revised Framework had been endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its forty-fourth session in 2013 as the framework for strengthening environment statistics programmes in countries. The Commission recognized the revised Framework as a useful tool in the context of sustainable development goals and targets (E/2013/24, chap. I.C, decision 44/105 (c)). The workshops organized in Mauritius (January 2015) and Togo (October 2015) aimed at imparting to statisticians from national statistical offices and experts from selected ministries of the environment or equivalent institutions, detailed knowledge and understanding of contemporary approaches to environment statistics, and

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<sup>4</sup> Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 19/Rev.3 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.XVII.10).

allowed them to identify gaps and deficiencies in environmental data and contributed to the production of regular, accurate and reliable environment statistics.

14. Building on the outcome of the High-level global conference organized by the Statistics Division and the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat) in January 2015 in New York and the recognition by the Statistical Commission, at its forty-sixth session, of the emerging demands for high-quality statistics and the need for the modernization of national, regional, subregional and international statistical systems, a series of seven subregional conferences on a transformative agenda for official statistics were organized between November 2015 and October 2016. Four of the conferences — in Thailand (August 2016) for the Asia and Pacific countries, Barbados (September 2016) for the Caribbean countries, Chile (September 2016) for the Latin American countries and Belarus (October 2016) for the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia — were funded through Regular Programme financing. Conferences for African countries, in Gabon (October 2015), Arab States, in Turkey (April 2016), and countries of South-Eastern Europe, in Croatia (October 2016), were supported by the Division's interregional adviser on the organization of national statistical systems. This series of conferences aimed at taking stock of various international, regional and national initiatives that have been undertaken or planned for integrating and modernizing statistical systems, and shaping the global action plan in support of the measurement and utilization of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators to enable its alignment with national and regional priorities and challenges. The first interim report on the transformative agenda for official statistics was submitted to the Statistical Commission at its forty-seventh session and the final report, along with global and regional action plans, has been prepared for submission to the Commission at its forty-eighth session.<sup>5</sup>

15. The Statistics Division, in cooperation with Statistics Korea (KOSTAT), organized an international seminar on “The Sustainable Development Goals: data disaggregation in the Republic of Korea” (November 2016). The seminar addressed some of the challenges faced by national statistical systems in producing the disaggregated data needed to monitor the sustainable development goals and targets. Other topics discussed included national experiences and challenges in producing disaggregated data, and innovative solutions to addressing the data needs under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and statistical capacity-building initiatives.

16. Traditionally, fellowships under the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation were provided to national statisticians and national geospatial information experts from developing countries to enable them to attend the meetings of the London Group on Environmental Accounting, the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics, the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts, the regional commissions in the area of national accounts and the Technical Subgroup for the International Standard Industrial Classification, conferences of the Centre for International Research on Economic Tendency Surveys, sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and other regional and international meetings organized by international or regional partner organizations.

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<sup>5</sup> E/CN.3/2016/4 and E/CN.3/2017/5, respectively.

In 2015-2016, the Statistics Division awarded a total of 76 individual fellowships to enable attendance at 13 events.

17. Resources under the Regular Programme can meet only a limited proportion of the demand of countries for technical assistance. The activities often entail provision of initial assistance which is subsequently augmented through projects financed from external budgetary resources, trust funds or the Development Account. Such multiplier effects enhance the coherence and maximize the impact of the capacity-building programme of the Statistics Division by making use of synergies and complementarities with projects funded through different sources. Through South-South cooperation, the projects increase the number of beneficiary countries and enable the development of national, regional, subregional and interregional partnerships.

18. With funding from its statistical revenue account, the Statistics Division assists developing countries in improving the quality, availability and dissemination of their official trade statistics for inclusion in the Division's databases, such as the UN Comtrade database and the UN Service Trade database. Regional training workshops are regularly organized and fellowships are regularly awarded in the areas of international merchandise trade statistics, trade in services statistics and tourism statistics. In 2015-2016, the Statistics Division organized workshops in El Salvador (February 2015), Oman (February 2016) and Turkmenistan (September 2016).

## **B. Development Account projects**

19. In the period 2015-2016, the Statistics Division continued the implementation of two Development Account projects. The period also marked the successful completion of two other projects and the launch of the Programme on Statistics and Data.

20. The four-year project on "Strengthening the geospatial information management capacities of developing countries for better policymaking at national, regional and international levels" was concluded in December 2015, with an implementation rate of 89.3 per cent. The project's main expected accomplishments were: (a) enhanced capacity of national institutions to improve the availability of geospatial data and information; and (b) improved accessibility by a wide range of users and policymakers to national, regional and global geospatial data infrastructures, through the development of common standards and integration of statistical and geospatial information. It is highly likely that those expected accomplishments, which were fully achieved, will produce positive impacts in developing countries in the foreseeable future. The project was also instrumental in enabling the establishment and strengthening of the global geospatial information management regional intergovernmental mechanisms and coordination and cooperation among national, regional and global mechanisms.

21. The project on "Supporting developing countries measure progress towards achieving a green economy" represented an attempt to mitigate the major challenges that are encountered by policymakers in most developing countries in making informed decisions in that regard. The project had a two-pronged goal of

establishing a list of indicators for measuring progress towards a green economy for developing countries, based on the work that has been carried out on the international level, and enhancing the statistical capacity of selected pilot developing countries to produce data for the agreed indicators on the green economy. The project, which was implemented in eight pilot countries — four in the Latin America and the Caribbean region (Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) and four in the Asia and Pacific region (Bhutan, Malaysia, Mongolia and Viet Nam) — was timely and highly relevant, given the emphasis in intergovernmental decisions on the development of Sustainable Development Goal indicators. The project has not only met its intended goals successfully but also triggered several initiatives, in particular through the work of various national statistical offices on green economy indicators. The project ended in June 2016 with an implementation rate of 99.4 per cent — the highest of any Statistics Division Development Account project so far.

22. The Statistics Division continues the implementation of the project on “Supporting Member States in developing and strengthening environment statistics and integrated environmental-economic accounting for improved monitoring of sustainable development”. Monitoring and measurement of progress towards environmental sustainability is weak owing to the insufficient production of environment statistics, environmental indicators and environmental-economic accounts. The project therefore aims at addressing the technical and institutional barriers to the establishment of routinely produced environment statistics and environmental-economic accounts at the national level. The structure of the project is centred around two modules. Module A, with five participating countries from the East African Community subregion (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania), aims at strengthening national capacities to produce environment statistics and will be based on the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics 2013 and its tools. Module B aims at implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting 2012 accounts in four countries in two subregions, Kenya and Uganda in Africa, and Malaysia and Viet Nam in Asia. Project implementation has intensified during 2016 with the conduct of a series of assessment missions and national and regional workshops in the project countries. The project is expected to conclude successfully by the end of 2017.

23. The Statistics Division is supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by developing countries through the project on “Enhancing national statistical capacity to measure, monitor, assess and report on progress on achieving post-2015 goals and targets for sustainable development”. The project, which will be implemented over a three-year period extending from the end of 2014 to the end of 2017, will provide assistance to national statistical offices in six pilot countries (Cambodia, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Rwanda, Uganda and Viet Nam) in two regions (Africa and Asia and the Pacific). The project is being delivered through a set of activities including desk studies of the countries’ current statistical capacity to monitor and report on those goals and targets, and workshops and in-country technical assistance missions to facilitate an increase in awareness regarding the monitoring and reporting requirements of the proposed current Sustainable Development Goals indicator framework, discussion of priorities, assessment of national capacities and gaps, assistance in the creation of implementation plans for monitoring and reporting and building of capacity for their implementation. The results achieved by the six project countries will be shared on



a regional level, allowing other countries to benefit from and follow their experiences. In addition, this project is expected to serve as a vehicle of transition to the implementation of the much larger and comprehensive Programme on Statistics and Data.

### **Programme on Statistics and Data**

24. Under the tenth tranche of the Development Account, the Statistics Division, together with the other implementing entities of the United Nations Secretariat, is implementing the Programme on Statistics and Data. The Programme has been developed in response to the Secretary-General's call upon the United Nations system to be "fit for purpose" so as to effectively contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Secretary-General called upon the United Nations system to deliver differently, focusing on a culture of collaboration and collective accountability, with respect to delivery of results and country-level impact based on national strategies and priorities. The Programme responds explicitly to two targets set out under Sustainable Development Goal 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development),<sup>6</sup> directly beneath the subheading entitled "Data, monitoring and accountability".

25. The Programme represents a new and innovative approach, which brings together the 10 implementing entities<sup>7</sup> and capitalizes on their individual technical capacities and comparative advantages, so as to enable the achievement of the common objective of helping developing countries face the data challenges presented by the new development agenda. The Development Account has traditionally been funded from three to four projects on statistics under each tranche, for an amount within the range of \$500,000-\$1,000,000 for each project, which makes the "10 million dollars programme" the biggest Development Account project ever approved by Member States. This Programme, which has been formulated as a unified and structured whole rather than as an amalgamation of individual projects and proposals, will provide a well-structured platform for support to developing countries in addressing their statistics and data challenges, and will likely exert a far greater impact and achieve far greater sustainable results, particularly as advancements could be replicated across regions.

26. Substantively, the Programme focuses on addressing the institutional arrangements needed in countries and, in particular, on the establishment, or strengthening, of national statistical systems for measurement and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals, and on the help needed in adapting national strategies for the development of statistics or similar plans. A second focus of the Programme is on addressing specific data gaps as regards monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals, which will require conceptual and methodological

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<sup>6</sup> Targets 17.18 and 17.19.

<sup>7</sup> The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

development, including leveraging of the leadership of the implementing entities in specific sectoral and thematic areas. A third focus of the Programme is on launching an e-learning portal on the production and utilization of Sustainable Development Goals indicators, which will provide access to the vast wealth of material and knowledge available within the United Nations system on statistical tools and measurement methodologies.

27. The Programme is structured around four distinct pillars: the means of implementation, environmental statistics, social statistics and economic statistics. Within the area of social statistics, the Programme establishes four sub-components which focus on distinct facets of social statistics, namely (a) population and demographic statistics; (b) gender statistics; (c) poverty and inequality statistics; and (d) peaceful and inclusive society statistics (crime and criminal justice statistics). The pillar and sub-component structure reflects the recognition that the entities need to address specific sectoral issues and work closely with producers and users of data within those sectoral areas. Each pillar and sub-component has a designated lead and co-lead entity, which are responsible for driving the strategic discussions among all entities and ensuring timely implementation of the activities of the pillars and sub-components. The leads will also address implementation challenges and decide on changes to the workplan in response to unforeseen issues and evolving challenges.

28. So that the Programme can be implemented effectively and the unique skills and expertise of the 10 implementing entities can be drawn upon, those global entities will assume the lead role primarily in the strengthening of existing standards and development of new statistical standards and methodologies within distinct sectoral areas. In specific areas where the regional commissions have a strong comparative advantage or interest, they will take the lead role in developing new data domains. The five regional commissions will have, for the most part, the primary responsibility for disseminating new methodologies and statistical standards among the countries in their region through the organization of national, subregional and regional workshops and seminars through which to effect the transfer of relevant skills and knowledge. They will also promote, at the national level, the strengthening of the statistical institutional environment, and statistical production processes, and exploration of the use of innovative technology and big data. The members of the global entities will participate as experts and as resource persons in those initiatives, as relevant. Using existing mechanisms within which the statistical community is present, each regional commission will assist in the sharing of knowledge throughout its region.

29. The Programme will be implemented in two phases. Activities have already commenced under the first phase, which covers the period from September 2016 to December 2017. The special focus of this phase will be on awareness-raising with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals indicator framework; strengthening institutional arrangements, including production processes; and conducting a gap analysis in selected countries. The second phase, during the period 2018-2019, will focus more on methodological development of indicators, implementation and scaling up of capacity-building and training.

### **A network of statistical training institutions**

30. Provision of training in various areas of official statistics is one of the core capacity-building activities. The demand for statistical capacity-building within the context of the 2030 Agenda is enormous and the demand for training in this area is expected to be even higher. The mode of training delivery in its traditional form is through organization of international and regional seminars and training workshops which, depending on the availability of resources, could be extended to training at subregional and subnational levels. Study visits for national statisticians are also organized periodically. Most of the training sessions and seminars are aimed at dissemination of the new or updated normative work undertaken by the Statistical Commission. As this raises questions on outreach and sustainability of such a delivery mechanism, the Statistics Division has embarked on a new initiative for the global coordination of statistical training. The first step in this direction was the organization of a side event as part of the forty-seventh session of the Commission in March 2016.<sup>8</sup>

31. There are a number of international, regional and national institutions that provide training on official statistics. Bringing them together within a network of statistical training institutions will facilitate sharing of courses, course material and best practices in training. The network will also allow for a greater harmonization of statistical curricula and their compliance with the adopted international statistical standards. The training materials will be developed predominantly in an e-learning format. This would make them both accessible to more trainees and less costly. Further, such a delivery of training would be enhanced and more systematic and effective in terms of its outreach, as compared with delivery through ad hoc workshops that are organized periodically, and would help in building sustainable capacities with regard to official statistics across the world. Specialized courses and training modules focused on the 2030 Agenda and the global indicators framework will be developed as a priority. Collaboration and partnership with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) under this initiative will be crucial, owing to the recognition of the Institute's long-standing experience in the provision of training and capacity-building. Other United Nations and international partners will be introduced gradually, with a view to enhancing the scope and substance of the training activities in training centres. The Statistics Division has undertaken, as part of the implementation of the Programme on Statistics and Data, an inventory of the existing training institutions and is working on the development of an e-learning portal. The Division will keep the Statistical Commission informed in this regard during its forthcoming sessions.

### **C. Donor-funded projects**

32. In the period 2015-2016, the Statistics Division continued the implementation of five multi-year capacity-building projects and four grant agreements.

33. Two multi-year projects in the area of statistical capacity-building and geospatial information management are funded by the Government of China. For their implementation, the Statistics Division collaborates closely with that country's

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/side-events/>.

National Bureau of Statistics and National Administration of Surveying, Mapping and Geo-information. Both projects provide strong support to the national statistical and geospatial information systems of developing countries and increase their capacity in those two substantive areas. The successful completion of the first five-year project on strengthening statistical capacity in China and other developing countries in Asia, especially in the area of basic statistics, at the end of 2014, allowed the second phase of the project to start, in 2015, for an additional five-year period.

34. The Statistics Division continued to implement the Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) initiative, executed jointly with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). The key deliverable of the initiative will be the development of methodological guidelines on measuring individual-level asset ownership and entrepreneurship from a gender perspective. To test and refine the draft guidelines in 2015 and 2016, the national statistical offices of the seven countries<sup>9</sup> piloted data collection on individual-level asset ownership and entrepreneurship. Those pilot studies provided an opportunity to test key aspects of the EDGE methodology, including questionnaire design, respondent selection protocols and recommended indicators for gender-informed evidence-based policy. The Statistical Commission has been invited to comment on the draft methodological guidelines for the production of statistics on asset ownership from a gender perspective.<sup>10</sup>

35. In 2015, the Statistics Division commenced the implementation of a project on “Strengthening disability statistics in the era of the post-2015 development agenda”, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia. It is expected that the project will result in (a) the formulation of international guidelines for the measurement of disability, taking into account existing measurement instruments, good national practices and country experiences and (b) the enhancement of the capacity of national statistical systems to collect and generate relevant quality disability statistics based on international guidelines. A series of regional meetings on disability measurement and statistics in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme were organized in 2016. They provided an opportunity for the discussion of the strategies for compilation of data on disability for the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals, enabled the sharing of national experiences and fostered intraregional cooperation.

36. At the end of 2016, the Statistics Division, jointly with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, completed a project on System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) Experimental Ecosystem Accounting. Through the project, seven pilot countries, namely, Bhutan, Chile, Indonesia, Mauritius, Mexico, South Africa and Viet Nam, were assisted in testing the SEEA and advancing SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting implementation. The more tangible outputs of the project included the global strategy towards advancing SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, and development of a communication strategy, guidelines

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<sup>9</sup> Georgia, Maldives, Mexico, Mongolia, the Philippines, South Africa and Uganda.

<sup>10</sup> E/CN.3/2017/11, sect. III and para. 36 (b).

and introductory training material on the compilation of the SEEA experimental ecosystem accounts.

37. The other projects under approved grant agreements that are being implemented by the Statistics Division entail the improvement of gender statistics, funded by the World Bank; the organization of regional and subregional conferences on the transformative agenda for official statistics in support of the post-2015 development agenda, and the development of an implementation and communication strategy for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, both funded by Eurostat; and big data for official statistics, funded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

38. The Statistics Division is about to launch two new donor-funded projects, in 2017. The project on “Natural capital accounting and valuation of ecosystem services”, funded by the European Commission, will engage five countries (Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa) where biodiversity is at stake, and facilitate an enhancement of their knowledge of the valuation of ecosystems and their services. The project on “Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals”, funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development, is a continuation of a previous project on “Improving the collation, availability and dissemination of national development indicators, including MDG indicators”, which ran between 2009 and 2015. The project will establish Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX)-based dissemination and exchange of Sustainable Development Goal indicators and metadata with 20 countries across Asia and Africa.

39. Within the context of these donor-funded projects, the Statistics Division expresses its gratitude to the Governments of Australia, China and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and to its partner organizations (the European Commission, Eurostat, the World Bank, UNEP, UN-Women and others) for their support of its capacity-building programmes, and is looking forward to stronger support and collaboration in the years to come.

### **III. Evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals**

40. In the period 2014-2016, the United Nations development system was subject to an independent system-wide evaluation of its contribution to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed goals. This evaluation was one of the two pilot evaluations implemented in response

to General Assembly resolution [68/229](#)<sup>11</sup> and within the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review.<sup>12</sup>

41. The core purpose of the evaluation was to help the United Nations system provide stronger support for national statistical capacity development for the achievement of national development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals. The evaluation had the following objectives: (a) to describe the importance and evolving status of national statistical capacity; (b) to analyse the role and strategic positioning of the United Nations system in support of national statistical capacity within the context of a larger international effort; (c) to assess, to the extent possible, the contribution of United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development and the value it has added, together with the factors that can account for its role and performance; and (d) to recommend strategic actions for strengthening the contribution of the United Nations system to national statistical capacity development in the future through amendments to its role, positioning and approaches.

42. The evaluation, which was the result of broad stakeholder involvement, covered all of the United Nations entities involved in national statistical capacity development, starting from the year 2000, with a focus on the last five years. The Evaluation Management Group assisted by an ad hoc advisory group (the Key Stakeholder Reference Group) and a team of consultants conducted the evaluation. The conclusions and recommendations derived from the evaluation were based on 16 country studies (6 country visits and 10 country desk reviews), 23 reviews of country-level evaluations (17 United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) evaluations and 6 other evaluations), 12 reviews of global and regional evaluations (8 United Nations and 4 non-United Nations evaluations) and 27 interviews with key stakeholder organizations (19 United Nations organizations and 8 partner organizations).

43. The conclusion of the evaluation was that the United Nations system has made a positive contribution to strengthening national capacities for the production of statistics but that there are challenges associated with addressing the difficult task of supporting better use of statistics. The strategic positioning of the United Nations system needs to be strengthened across the global, regional and national levels. At the national level, greater coordination, coherence and integration are required to strengthen the contribution of the United Nations system. It was recommended in the evaluation that support for national statistical capacity development should become a major strategic priority for the United Nations system and that the principal goal of this work should be the better use of statistics to support the achievement of national development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Overall, the evaluation provided a good basis for help in framing the dialogue on the continued role of the United Nations system in supporting countries and for meeting the changes that are needed to enhance its comparative value in a diverse and rapidly transforming world with multiple players, all of which are seeking to enhance development results.

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<sup>11</sup> The second pilot evaluation entails the meta-evaluation of the quality of United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) evaluations issued from 2010 to 2014 and a synthesis.

<sup>12</sup> See also General Assembly resolution [67/226](#).

44. Below are the main conclusions and recommendations set out in the evaluation.<sup>13</sup> It is noteworthy that in the elaboration under recommendation 4 of the evaluation (see para. 83 thereof), it is mentioned explicitly that the Statistical Commission, as the United Nations intergovernmental body bringing together all national chief statisticians, should play a leading role, together with the relevant organizations outside the United Nations system, in developing a strategic framework for the next five years regarding United Nations system integrated support for national statistical capacity development at the global, regional and country levels.

*Conclusion 1:* United Nations system entities at the global, regional and country levels have made important contributions to the development of national capacities for producing statistics. The work that the United Nations system has carried out on establishing statistical standards has been highlighted as an important area of success. However, there are some challenges concerning the quality of the contribution to statistical production, specifically related to coordination of activities, the sustainability of the results and the relevance of activities to the priorities of all national stakeholders. Nonetheless, the United Nations system needs to build on its successes, address the challenges and maintain its global leadership in this area in order to be effective in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

*Recommendation 1:* The General Assembly, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, should make national statistical capacity development a major strategic priority of the United Nations system entities addressing production, dissemination and use of official statistics, and should call upon all Member States to redirect the financial resources necessary to support all three areas.

*Conclusion 2:* Although the United Nations system has helped member States to strengthen their capacities for the production of statistics, more needs to be done to operationalize the mantra of the Statistical Commission that better data lead to better lives. The United Nations system has not always recognized statistics as a national governance issue and has not done enough to promote and facilitate the use of statistics to achieve national development goals. Effective use of statistics by policymakers, civil society and the private sector is essential if countries are going to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and go beyond simply monitoring progress towards the targets. This requires support for the development of national capacities to explore the wealth of data often produced by national statistical systems and to undertake deeper analysis, not just of trends but of the underlying causes of the obstacles to achieving national development goals.

*Recommendation 2:* The General Assembly, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda, should reaffirm that the principal goal of the United Nations system support for national statistical capacity development is *the use of national statistics for supporting the achievement of national development goals*, including the

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<sup>13</sup> See [A/71/431](#), which contains the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/REP/2016/5) for the full text of the evaluation and its technical annex.

Sustainable Development Goals, and in this regard, request United Nations system organizations to make all efforts to support achievement of this goal.

*Recommendation 3:* Executive heads of United Nations entities that work on national statistical capacity development should establish a network (a working group or task force) that will bring together the different entities' policy, programme and statistics departments in order to define how to better support more effective use of statistics by national stakeholders to achieve national development goals and should develop system-wide guidance for United Nations system entities on this issue.

*Conclusion 3:* The United Nations system is not as yet appropriately positioned to increase its contribution, and the quality of that contribution, to national statistical capacity development in the new global statistical environment. The 2030 Agenda presents challenges and opportunities that will require a more effective and efficient United Nations system response. Notwithstanding the ongoing work of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which has the potential to strengthen the United Nations system's leadership of the global statistical system, no overarching plan exists at present that clarifies the respective roles of the various United Nations system entities supporting national statistical capacity development efforts, or the division of labour between them. In addition, the level of investment in the United Nations entities may be inadequate if they are to lead the integrated United Nations system response to the emerging data revolution for sustainable development. From the year 2000 up to the present, national statistical capacity development has been one among many United Nations priorities for supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, but if the United Nations system is to be successful in regard to the Sustainable Development Goals, it should give greater importance to this area of its work and consider reviewing the mandates of the key participating United Nations entities.

*Recommendation 4:* The General Assembly should request the Secretary-General, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda, to develop a strategic framework for the next five years regarding United Nations system integrated support for national statistical capacity development at the global, regional and country levels, setting out the roles and areas of work for entities at all three levels.

*Conclusion 4:* At the country level, United Nations system entities are not always acting as a coordinated, coherent and integrated system when supporting national statistical capacity development. Countries frequently receive support from the United Nations system in the form of many separate initiatives, often driven by global agendas, and usually across a wide range of national partners. Although the programmatic fragmentation of the United Nations system support has been addressed (to some extent) in some countries through joint United Nations programmes, approaching national statistical capacity development as a system has, in general, been a challenge. Where there is a lack of coordination and coherence, it becomes more difficult for the United Nations system to provide broader support to Member States in developing comprehensive national statistical systems that will sustain the production of statistics and their use. In this respect, United Nations resident coordinators' offices need to be strengthened with statistical capacity to



promote an integrated United Nations role in national statistical capacity development.

*Recommendation 5:* The General Assembly, in the context of the 2017-2020 quadrennial comprehensive policy review, should ensure that national statistical capacity development is a strategic area of support for all United Nations country teams, recognizing that the role will vary significantly between countries as determined by the national authorities.

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