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**REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE WORKING GROUPS CREATED AT THE THIRD
MEETING OF THE STATISTICAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS OF THE
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

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I. BACKGROUND

1. At its third meeting, which was held in Santiago, Chile, in June 2005, the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) agreed to establish working groups to promote the more active participation of the countries in implementing the programme of regional cooperation of the Conference. To this end, the working groups should encourage the sharing of experiences among countries and promote joint activities and initiatives, in short, support the development of activities which they consider of great urgency and priority at a particular time. As such, they are expected to make a significant contribution to achieving the goals of the strategic plan of the Conference for 2005-2015.

2. At the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee of the Conference, which took place in Mexico City in November 2006, the Chairperson presented the document “Implementation and monitoring of the programme of regional statistical work, July 2005-June 2007: responsibilities of the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, and tentative terms of reference of the working groups” (DDR/3). The issues covered by the six working groups are as follows: Monitoring of Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals, National Accounts, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Population Censuses, Human Resources and Training and Institution-building. This document offers recommendations for the definition of the terms of reference of the groups, specifies their structure and mode of functioning and outlines the responsibilities of the countries that act as coordinators of the groups. It also underscores the importance of the activities of the groups, especially those relating to the preparation of statistical project proposals that would help to establish the proper and normal functioning of the working groups and recommends that each working group should “organize its efforts in light of the initiatives already existing both within and outside the region, and the activities of other working groups. Measures should also be adopted for the monitoring of progress and the problems encountered by the various working groups.”¹

3. The discussion at the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee in that connection emphasized the need for the groups to be informed of the activities of ECLAC and other similar bodies such as the expert groups, city groups and other international initiatives, in order to avoid duplication of efforts and benefit from the experiences and best practices of these groups and committees. In the same way, during the exchange of opinions of the delegates, there was emphasis on the need to incorporate other actors from national statistical systems and not only from national statistical offices. Last, there was a concern to achieve efficient implementation mechanisms owing to the large quantity and complexity of the proposed activities and projects.

4. In order to facilitate the reporting on the activities of the Working Groups, the Secretariat devised and distributed to the groups a standard procedure that summarized the information required: member countries of the group, a description of the terms of reference, a description of the activities carried out, expected outputs to be submitted at the fourth meeting of the Conference and forthcoming activities. The activity reports of the following groups are available to the sixth meeting of the Executive Committee: Population Censuses; National Accounts; Human Resources and Training; , Institution-building; and Information and Communications Technologies.

¹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Report of the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC/L.2505), Santiago, Chile, 24 March 2006.

5. The Executive Committee is called upon to evaluate the progress of the work of the groups and to identify the progress achieved, the difficulties encountered and the pending challenges in this area. In particular, the Executive Committee should reflect on this new modality of work and cooperation in the region and formulate suggestions and recommendations on the strength of which the Conference, gathered in June 2007 at its fourth meeting, will be in a position to define and adopt the agenda of work of the groups and consider options for their future development.

6. The following section reports, firstly, on the progress of the Working Groups and, subsequently, on the outputs to be submitted by the latter at the fourth meeting of the Conference, as concrete and tangible results of their work. The annex to this document contains the summary reports provided by the different working groups.

II. MAIN PROGRESS AND EXPECTED RESULTS

7. First of all, countries participated actively and in significant numbers in most of the working groups. Sixteen countries from Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, two from Europe and the United States of America participate in one or more of the working groups. The absence of countries of the English-speaking Caribbean is cause for concern and the Executive Committee should propose actions to promote and ensure the participation of that subregion in the work of the groups. As can be observed from the summaries in the annex, a large number of countries are directly involved in implementing various of the activities listed in the programme of the groups.

8. Five of the six groups established at the third meeting of the Conference defined the terms of reference for their operation and, in particular, pledged to develop specific outputs to be submitted to the Conference at its fourth meeting. The working group on the Millennium Development Goals has not yet managed to meet. Nevertheless, in view of the great importance of this issue for the international community, ECLAC has carried out a very large number of activities geared to strengthening the statistical capacities of the countries of the region for monitoring progress towards the Goals. Details of these activities are reported on in the Progress report by the Secretariat on the activities of the programme of regional statistical work for Latin America and the Caribbean, July 2005-July 2007 (LC/L.2588). In an effort to stimulate the activities of this working group, the Executive Committee, through informal consultations, requested Argentina to coordinate a subsidiary working group on the updating of the methodology used to measure poverty in the region.

9. Meanwhile, at the request of the Director of the National Statistical Office (ONE) of the Dominican Republic, the coordinator of the Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies, the Secretariat prepared a note to report to the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee on the progress made in this area (DDR/4). The activities reported by the Working Group were carried out in the context of the project of the Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC), whose main objective is to centralize and harmonize data that serve to monitor and analyse the status of the "information society", as it is called, in Latin American and Caribbean. This Observatory seeks to support the national statistical offices in the collection of ICT indicators in the region and in the methodological processes that this involves. The Secretariat has continued to play an active role in the group's activities.

10. The various groups have pledged to provide the following outputs for the fourth meeting of the Conference (in June 2007):

- (i) Working Group on Population Censuses: Preparation of two documents: one on new demands for information applicable to the 2010 round of censuses and the other on the results and applicability of alternative population census methods in Latin America.
- (ii) Working Group on Human Resources and Training: a final report on the project on training and education in ECLAC member countries.
- (iii) Working Group on Institution-building: an analysis of the situation of the countries in each subregion, corresponding to Phase I of the Project “Enhancing the quality of statistics in the region: integration and harmonization of instruments for social statistics”.
- (iv) Working Group on Information and Communications Technologies: three outputs have been committed: a proposal for the adoption of a harmonized set of basic ICT indicators as a recommendation to the national statistical offices; a compendium of good practices for the collection of statistics in homes, businesses and government; a recommendation to the Conference for the construction of a harmonized regional database on ICTs in ECLAC, to which the public will have access.
- (v) Working Group on National Accounts: Analysis and strategy for differential work with countries on the basis of their status with regard to the adoption of the System of National Accounts (SNA).

11. An important landmark in the groups' work has been the preparation and approval of the financing of three projects under the programme on regional public goods of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Two of these projects were prepared by the Working Group on Institution-building: “Migration and remittances”, relating to the countries of the Central American Common Market (CACM), and “Strengthening of the quality of statistics in the region: integration and harmonization of instruments for social statistics”, relating to the countries of the Andean Community); the third project, conducted by the Working Group on Population Censuses, is entitled “Project on the dissemination and evaluation of harmonized census statistics for social programmes for sustainable development in MERCOSUR, Bolivia and Chile as well as in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Ecuador and Mexico. These projects and the relevant financing represent a valuable support for the work of the groups, as it will allow them to execute the scheduled activities and prepare the outputs agreed upon for submission at the fourth meeting of the Conference. Some activities have already been carried out within the framework of the project of the Working Group on Population Censuses and the Project on Migration and Remittances in accordance with their respective time-lines.

III. MAIN DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY THE WORKING GROUPS

12. The difficulties are, first of all, associated with the absence or low level of participation in the working groups of a significant number of member countries of the Conference. Some of the national statistical offices may not have the human and financial resources necessary to enable them to participate fully in the activities of the Conference. Language may also be a barrier, in view of the low level of

participation of the English-speaking Caribbean countries. The Executive Committee should recommend actions to resolve this situation in the shortest possible time.

13. The non-establishment and non-functioning of the Working Group on the Millennium Development Goals must be a special concern for the Executive Committee, in view of the importance of the issue, defined in the Strategic Plan of the Conference as one of the three greatest statistical challenges in the medium term. Fortunately, as mentioned above, all ECLAC divisions and units have a very active agenda of work in this area. Nevertheless, one of the difficulties identified by ECLAC in its report to the seminar on national statistical offices and the Millennium Development Goals, (organized in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, from 18 to 20 May 2005, by ECLAC, IDB, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with the collaboration of the National Statistical Office of the Dominican Republic) was the low level of participation to date of some of the national statistical offices in the preparation of national reports. This often has negative consequences for the quality and comparability of reports and weakens the efforts and cooperation that is needed within the countries in order to create and strengthen statistical capacities for monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. In view of the above, the Executive Committee will have to give much attention to analysing this issue, in order to find actions that can overcome these difficulties within the shortest possible time.

14. In terms of the challenges for the future and bearing in mind the experience gained so far, the Working Groups, expert committees and other coordination and cooperation bodies that the Conference may decide to create in order to promote regional cooperation activities, must follow certain rules in order to optimize their activity and results. In particular, in order to optimize their performance, the working groups should seek, *inter alia*, to align their work fully with the goals of the strategic plan of the Conference; to establish terms of reference that are specific and clear from the outset; to define responsibilities for the members of the groups, in operational terms and in terms of the human and financial resources required; to avoid duplication of efforts with other similar initiatives carried out by other organizations and make full use of the experiences and progress of the expert groups, city groups and other initiatives in the field of statistics carried out in the context of the United Nations. The Executive Committee should exchange ideas on this important issue in order to generate recommendations for discussion and adoption at the fourth meeting of the Conference.

Annex

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUPS OF THE STATISTICAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS OF ECLAC

A. REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON INSTITUTION-BUILDING

1. Name of the Working Group and of the Coordinator

Working Group on Institution-building of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); Mexico

2. Member countries of the Group and names of the participants:

Argentina: Mario Krieger; Bolivia: Marco Ayala; Brazil: Zelia Bianchi; Chile: José Hinostroza; Colombia: Pedro José Fernández Ayala, Lucila Trujillo, Nicolás Dib David; Honduras: Gloria Velázquez., Mexico: Jesús Romo y García, Ricardo Rodríguez López; Paraguay: Virginia Mandelburger; Spain: Antonio Martínez; Uruguay: Susana López.

3. Brief description of the Group's terms of reference

Objectives: To strengthen the organization and strategic management practices of the national statistical offices and the national statistical systems.

Activities: The Group on Institution-building will carry out activities in relation to the following lines of action: (i) Collect and disseminate information on the legal frameworks governing national statistical systems and national statistical offices; (ii) Compile and disseminate information on best practices in terms of organization and strategic management. (iii) Form networks of legal and administrative experts in the countries of the region; (iv) Develop and promote performance assessment mechanisms for national statistical systems; (v) Promote the use of official statistics in the formulation and evaluation of public policies, in business and by society; (vi) Develop indicators of the use of information in the formulation and evaluation of public policies, in business and by society; (vii) Implement a system for the Conference to track the progress made by national statistical systems in the region; (viii) Harmonize statistics; and (ix) Take advantage of information and communications technologies in order to produce and disseminate statistical information more efficiently.

Expected outputs to be presented at the fourth meeting of the Statistical Conference: Execution of Phase 1 of the project “Strengthening the quality of statistics in the region: integration and harmonization of instruments for social statistics —analysis of the situation of the countries in each subregion. This includes the following:

- Project planning and organization;
- Confirmation of participating countries and responsibilities;
- Inventory of questionnaires for collection, methodological documents and existing databases;

- Preparation of a consultation seminar;
- Preparation of a seminar to define specific topics for consideration;
- Methodology training course for use of the database of internationally recommended standards;
- Refining of the database on internationally recommended statistical standards to incorporate information on the specific topics selected;
- Response of countries to the electronic questionnaire on the degree of consistency with statistical standards recommended by the relevant international organizations for each of the specific topics chosen. On this basis the existing levels of homogeneity or heterogeneity will be defined using international standards, which will help to define subregional harmonization needs.
- The degree of consistency of national practices with internationally recommended statistical standards will be assessed for each specific issue and for each subregion on the basis of the international statistical methodology, standards and recommendations.

4. Description of the activities carried out

The activities of this Working Group have been organized around the project submitted by Colombia entitled: “Strengthening of the quality of statistics in the region: Integration and harmonization of instruments for social statistics”. The methodology and the inventory of international standards developed by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI) have been contributed by Mexico, together with the conceptual refinement and definition of the terms of reference of the project, and may be accessed freely.

The overall objective of this project is to improve the levels of harmonization in the measuring instruments and statistical information production methodology for social issues, with a view to achieving higher levels of comparability and homogeneity in the region and subregions.

After a process of adjustment to comply with the criteria adopted by the Conference in relation to the participation of the countries of the region, clarity of the statistical outputs as regional public goods and identification of specific topics, the project was formally submitted to IDB to obtain financing.

In the area of financial assistance, Mexico and the Secretariat, together with the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21), have analysed various options for support, geared mainly to Central America and some countries of the Andean Community and the English-speaking Caribbean.

5. Forthcoming activities

(a) Definition of regional or subregional standards (Phase II of the project)

- For each subregion and specific topic, the results of the diagnostic study will be disseminated indicating the statistical instruments and their respective degrees of consistency.

- A seminar will be organized to hold discussions and reach consensus on the possibility of adopting subregional standards for specific topics; preliminary proposals will be presented and discussed and the question of adoption of standards, addressed.
- Documents will be prepared and the approved versions distributed.

(b) *Implementation of subregional standards in requesting countries (phase III of the project)*

- Six subregional training workshops will be held, each on a specific topic.

B. REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON ICT MEASUREMENT

1. Name of the Working Group and of the Coordinator

Working Group on Measurement of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); Dominican Republic

2. Member countries of the Group and names of the participants:

Colombia: Ernesto Rojas Morales; Dominican Republic: Pablo Tactuk, Danilo Duarte; Mexico: Abdón Sánchez. ECLAC and the Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC) will participate and provide support for the work of this group. Soon other countries will be formally incorporated into the Working Group Nevertheless, experts from various Latin American and Caribbean countries participated in the work.

3. Brief description of the Group's terms of reference

Objectives: To exchange experiences and design suitable methodologies for the development of statistics and indicators relating to information and communications technologies (ICTs)

Activities: The Working Group on ICT Measurement will undertake actions designed: (i) to propose to the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC a harmonized set of basic ICT indicators and statistics as a recommendation to the national statistical offices This set has been validated at various regional meetings of national and international experts; (ii) to prepare a compendium of practices for the collection of ICT statistics in homes, businesses and government. The compendium of practices will be produced with support from the Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC) and ECLAC; (iii) to recommend to the Conference the construction of a regional ICT database in ECLAC.

Expected outputs for submission to the fourth meeting of the Conference

- A proposal that the Conference should formally welcome the recommendation on the adoption of key ICT indicators for household and business surveys, prepared in the context of the World Summit on the Information Society (thematic conference of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS));

- A proposal to the Conference that the recommendations on the adoption of key indicators should be accompanied by a compendium of practices on the inclusion of ICT questions in household and business surveys. This compendium is being prepared, and will be discussed with experts of the Working Group at the third Workshop on Measuring the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean, scheduled for November 2006.
- A proposal that the Conference should request ECLAC to develop a harmonized regional database with the indicators that were already globally agreed at the World Summit on the Information Society.

4. Description of the activities carried out

At the request of the Working Group, ECLAC prepared for the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee (Mexico, 14.-15 November 2005) a briefing note on the progress made in relation to ICT statistics and basic indicators.² The activities reported by the Working Group were carried out in the context of the OSILAC project, whose main objective is to centralize and harmonize data that serve to monitor and analyse the status of the "information society", as it is called, in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Meanwhile, the Director of the National Statistical Office of the Dominican Republic, in his capacity as coordinator of the group, made a presentation at the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis, in November 2005, on the Dominican experience in relation to ICT measurement and on the activities underway for implementing the project on the Observatory for the Information and Knowledge Society in the Dominican Republic (OSIC-RD), which takes into account the recommendations of OSILAC concerning the measurement of ICTs and qualitative information on the subject.

5. Forthcoming activities

Preparation for March 2007, with support from OSILAC and ECLAC, of the final version of the compendium of good practices with respect to the inclusion by the national statistical offices of questions on ICT statistics in household, business and government surveys.

Organization of a seminar on the compendium of good practices on 9 and 10 November 2006, in collaboration with OSILAC and ECLAC.

² Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Working Group on Information and Communications Technologies: briefing note for the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas" (DDR/4), Santiago, Chile, 8 November 2005.

C. REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON HUMAN RESOURCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING

1. Name of the Working Group and of the Coordinator

Working Group on Human Resource Education and Training of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); Spain and Argentina.

2. Member countries of the group and names of the participants

Argentina: Mario Krieger, Guillermo Bluske and Ana María Edwin; Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Egilda Romero and Dalia Baptista. Brazil, Sandra Furtado de Oliveira and José Matías de Lima; Colombia, Néstor Hernando Parra; Cuba, M^a Elena Echevarría Fariñas; Dominican Republic, Sonia M. Modesto D'Oleo; Francia, Dominique Ladiray; Guatemala, Ricardo Ávila; Honduras, Sergio J. and René Soler; México, Francisco Escobar Vega and Virginia Abrim; Spain, Antonio Martínez Serrano, Antonio M. Salcedo Galiano, Suelí Lorenzo Fernández, Yolanda Gómez Menchón, Ana C. Saura Vinuesa and Rosa Meneses; United States of America, Charles Louis Kincannon and Glenn Ferri;

3. Brief description of the Group's terms of reference

Objectives. The frame of reference for the activities of the group is the Conference's mandate to develop a specific project for strengthening education and training of human resources of the national statistical systems in the countries of the region. The ultimate aim of this group, in line with the strategic goals of the strategic plan 2005-2015, is to promote the training of competent human resources in producing statistical information, managing national statistical systems and carrying out research into statistical methodology through existing training centres, and, consequently, to set up for future years an international consensus-based, sustainable training programme that is consistent with the real training needs of statisticians in the region.

Activities. The main activity of the group is the preparation and presentation of a project on statistical education and training in ECLAC Countries, which would be based on the following:

- Identification and documentation of the institutional needs for education of statisticians (in accordance with line of action 1 of Strategic goal 2. of the Final draft of the strategic plan of the Conference.
- The setting up of an inventory of donor institutions, in particular, the compilation of information on statistical training centres in ECLAC countries with reference to the human, technical and financial resources at their disposal for managing and organizing educational activities at the international level. Organization and harmonization of the face-to-face statistics training programmes by coordinating the activities of training centres within member countries of the Conference (in accordance with line of action.4 of Strategic goal 2 of the Final draft of the strategic plan of the Conference 2005-2015).
- The setting up of a distance education model for the development of the human resource needed for the production and dissemination of statistical information on the basis of

coordination between the training centres of the region, (in accordance with line of action 5 of Strategic goal 2 of the Final draft of the strategic plan of the Conference 2005-2015).

The final result expected from this project is the coordination of a regional training programme for the next few years, which will be implemented by creating a network of training centres based on the existing capacity in the region.

Expected outputs for submission at the fourth meeting of the Conference

- According to the Working Group's calendar of activities, a final report on the project on statistical education and training in ECLAC Countries will be submitted to the Conference at its fourth meeting. The results of this project will be submitted for evaluation and consideration by the Conference with a view to its approval. Argentina will also submit a technical proposal.

4. Description of the activities carried out

At the end of May 2006 the President of the National Statistical Institute (INE) of Spain, invited the member countries of the Executive Committee of the Conference and other countries attending the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee to join the Working Group on Human Resource Education and Training and to collaborate closely in the preparation and implementation of the project on statistical education and training in ECLAC countries. The response was highly positive and a broad working group of twelve countries was established.

From that time on and in the months prior to the sixth meeting of the Executive Committee, the coordinator of the group has been working intensively on the preparation of a draft project document. At the beginning of August 2007, the draft and the questionnaires will be distributed by electronic mail to the members of the Working Group, who will be advised at the same time of the deadline for making observations and comments. Argentina, in its capacity as co-leader of the Group, has already made proposals on the first draft of the project document prepared by INE of Spain and is preparing proposals for inclusion in the document when it is received. Once a consensus has been reached on the proposal, it will be submitted for consideration and discussion at the sixth meeting of the Executive Committee.

5. Forthcoming activities

The tentative calendar of activities, subject to discussion in the Working Group, is as follows:

- 25-26 September 2006: presentation of the project and work of the Group at the sixth meeting of the Executive Committee.
- January 2007: first face-to-face meeting of the project with the members of the Working Group and other countries of the region to evaluate and identify in detail the statistical training needs of the countries of ECLAC.
- April 2007: second face-to-face project meeting to establish the viability of creating a network of existing training centres and approval of the project outline.
- June 2007: presentation of the project results at the fourth meeting of the Conference.

Spain may finance most of the costs of the two face-to-face meetings envisaged for this project.

D. REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON CENSUSES

1. Name of the Working Group and of the Coordinator

Working Group on Censuses of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); Chile.

2. Member Countries of the Group and names of participants

Argentina: Enrique Amadasi; Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: Gerardo Enrique Correa Marín; Bolivia: Freddy Estrada; Brazil: José Ribeiro Soares Guimarães, Wasmália Socorro Barata Bivar, Alicia Bercovich; Colombia: Ernesto Rojas Morales; Cuba: Juan Carlos Alfonso Fraga. Dominican Republic: Mercedes Abreu. Ecuador: Corina del Pilar Ortíz Mejía; El Salvador: Ricardo Humberto Olmos Guevara; Honduras: María Magdalena García Ugarte; Mexico: Alfredo Bustos y de la Tijera; Nicaragua: Néstor Delgadillo Paguaga. Paraguay: Miguel Ángel Gómez González. Peru: Nancy Hidalgo; Uruguay: José María Calvo.

3. Brief description of the Group's terms of reference

Objectives: The Working Group on Censuses defines and organizes its activities in accordance with the strategic plan 2005-2015 of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC. It is a challenge to provide information that is appropriate to the internationally agreed development goals, including those that are contained in the Millennium Declaration and those relevant to the 2010 round of censuses to be carried out in the region. Country representatives have advocated raising the criteria of adequacy, quality and transparency of their national statistics to the level of best international practices, and using these as a basis for achieving excellence in official statistics among users, economic agents, and social and political actors and sectors involved in decision-making. In this connection, the censuses are a unique and important key for implementing the proposed objectives for the region and provide harmonized and comparable information based on the best practices existing at the international level, taking into account the current diversity of the countries.

Activities: Considerable progress has been made towards the implementation of the activities and the achievement of positive results relating to the project for the dissemination and evaluation of harmonized census statistics for social programmes for sustainable development in MERCOSUR, Bolivia and Chile, together with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Ecuador and Mexico, for which financial assistance has been provided by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The participation of the countries in the third International seminar on alternative methods in demographic censuses, held in Rio de Janeiro, in May 2006, has been a contribution to the future vision of censuses and a redefinition of new and alternative methodologies, which can be assessed through tests in the field, taking into account the individual circumstances of each country.

Expected outputs for submission at the fourth meeting of the Conference: The activities carried out or scheduled will be used in the preparation of two documents, one relating to new information demands applicable to the 2010 round of censuses and another concerning the results and applicability of alternative population census methodologies in Latin America, which have arisen as an innovative experience in data collection.

4. Description of the activities carried out

One of the results achieved has been the dissemination of data from the 2000 census round through a web page that affords access to the relevant database. Information is now available on the countries that make up the extended MERCOSUR (including Bolivia and Chile); data for the remaining countries of the Working Group on Censuses are expected to be included at a future date.

The first workshop for dissemination of the joint evaluation of the results of the 2000 round of censuses was held in June 2006, with a view to generating modifications that will apply to the 2010 round of censuses. This workshop is part of the Project for dissemination and evaluation of harmonized census statistics for social programmes for sustainable development in MERCOSUR, Bolivia and Chile as well as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Ecuador and Mexico. These countries all participated, while Peru and Colombia, which have adopted new census methodologies (the permanent census and multiple census, respectively), attended as guests.

Each of the countries participating in the above-mentioned seminar has committed to being part of the working teams, in order to produce the final documents and conclusions of the seminar.

Argentina and Chile are working on the document relating to guidelines for methodological development for censuses which will make it possible to plan and hold regional workshops in the period 2006-2007.

5. Forthcoming activities

One of the main subjects of the theoretical discussion on censuses in the region is the development of common methodologies. The activities already carried out will be used as a basis for two workshops to be held, respectively, in the last quarter of 2006 and the second half of 2007 in order to establish a joint evaluation of the various indicators and evaluate the census operation, its results and the recommendations for the next census round (2010), taking into account harmonized variables that facilitate comparison between countries of the group.

E. REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE SYSTEM OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

1. Name of the Working Group and of the Coordinator

Working Group on the System of National Accounts of the Statistical Conference of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); Coordinator: Brazil

2. Member countries of the group and names of participants

Brazil: Roberto Luiz Olinto Ramos, Coordinator of the System of National Accounts of Brazilian Geographical and Statistical Institute (IBGE) – (Leader); Mexico: Francisco Guillén of the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI); United States: Marshall Reinsdorf of the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

3. Brief description of the Group's terms of reference

Objectives: The activities relating to national accounts correspond to line of action 7 of Strategic goal 3 of the Final Draft Strategic Plan of the Conference, which proposes that an assessment be made of the implementation of the System of National Accounts in the countries and their technical and institutional coordination with the production of economic statistics, and to line of action 8 of Strategic goal 3 of the Final Draft relating to the generation of recommendations and the promotion of initiatives that permit the full implementation of the System of National Accounts 1993 (1993 SNA) in all the countries of the region and the revision scheduled for 2008.

Activities: The Group's main activity is to carry out an assessment in order to classify the countries of the region in three groups according to their level of adoption of SNA 1993. On the basis of this assessment, it will be possible to establish differential strategies for the countries in keeping with their needs.

Expected outputs for submission at the fourth meeting of the Conference: Assessment and strategy for working on a differential basis with countries according to their status with regard to the adoption of SNA 1993.

4. Description of the activities carried out:

A draft assessment and programme of the Working Group on the System of National Accounts of the Conference, based on a survey conducted in 2004 by the United Nations Statistical Division, which supports the conclusions and recommendations adopted by the Conference in 2005.

A preliminary work proposal was drawn up.

A formal letter was sent to the countries inviting them to participate in the Working Group and to register on the site prepared by INEGI, in which collaboration activities can be carried out. The letter provided information on the lines of action of Strategic goal 3 of the Final draft strategic plan 2005-2015 and the objectives of the Group.

These objectives were presented in October 2005 at the Latin American Seminar on National Accounts, an event sponsored annually by ECLAC.

5. Forthcoming activities

The strategic guidelines of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC address the issue of the System of National Accounts. The Strategic Plan of the Conference recognizes that one of the priority challenges of national statistical systems in the next 10 years is the revision of the System scheduled for the year 2008; one of the strategic goals is to generate recommendations relating to the systems of information in terms of statistics linked to national accounts and other economic statistics required for the formulation and monitoring of economic and social policy.

The challenges relating to the System of National Accounts as identified at the third meeting of the Conference are immense, bearing in mind the complexity of the issue; by definition, national accounts constitute a status report of national statistical systems themselves, and this reveals wide disparities. Hence the importance of forming regional blocs organized according to the specific and differential needs of countries. The complexity increases when account is taken of the institutional arrangements involved

in the calculation of national accounts, since in a large number of countries in the region, this responsibility falls to the central bank and, in a smaller number of countries, the central banks, themselves, are the entities that prepare a significant proportion of the basic statistics required.

Another important issue and one which influences the work of the group has to do with the initiatives underway. ECLAC is in favour of holding an annual technical meeting, which clearly does not meet all the requirements of the countries; it also has a site that receives different contributions. Several countries have organized technical cooperation arrangements or support for independent consultants attached to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or other organizations in order to develop their national accounting systems; many are changing their base year, which means that they are less available and less interested in discussing the harmonization of their systems. Moreover, there are regional cooperation projects, such as that of the countries of the Andean Community, which carry out the harmonization and development of their systems of national accounts and receive backing from the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE); several Central American countries have signed agreements with IMF and with permanent consultants for managing their change of base year; the MERCOSUR countries will be initiating negotiations with a view to an agreement with the European Community to harmonize, among other things, their systems of national accounts. The International Comparison Programme is another initiative that requires harmonization and refinement of the systems of national accounts in the region and which introduces new interlocutors interested in this work.

The Working Group should avoid duplication of efforts and the overlap of functions and adopt an approach that incorporates not only the countries, but also international organizations involved in existing cooperation agreements. The central banks identify the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC as a representative body that deals only with the statistical institutes, while the Latin American Seminar on National Accounts at its meeting in October 2005 sought to obtain a definition of its institutional relationship with the Conference.

In short, it is necessary to establish a differential coordination strategy for this Working Group by defining the representation of all participants in the process. The group set up initially by ECLAC, IBGE, Statistics Canada (STATCAN) and IMF in June 2006 during dissemination of the International Comparison Programme in order to assess the harmonization of the weighting structures used in calculating purchasing power parities can be a good opportunity for the Conference to strengthen the initiatives already undertaken by the countries and ECLAC with a view to harmonizing and refining the national systems of accounts in the region.

The Executive Committee is urged to consider hiring a consultant to carry out an assessment in order to classify the countries of the region in three groups:

- Group 1: countries which are at an advanced stage in terms of the adoption of the SNA recommendations but which need to complete this task;
- Group 2: countries that need to complete the adoption of SNA and which have the basic sources of information to do so;
- Group 3: countries whose statistical information bases are too limited to permit the adoption of SNA.

On the basis of this assessment, it will be possible to establish for the countries differential strategies that match their needs and consequently are more effective. Should this strategy be adopted, it could be presented at the next meeting of the Conference thereby building awareness among countries of the importance of participating in the work of the Group.

F. REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON UPDATING OF POVERTY MEASUREMENT METHODOLOGY IN THE REGION

1. Name of the Working Group and of the Coordinator

The group is now being set up. The National Institute of Statistics and the Census of Argentina, which will act as the coordinator, has duly sent the first version of the project "Updating of the poverty measurement methodology in the region" to the authorities of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This initiative has its origin in the informal meeting of the members of the Executive Committee of the Conference, held in New York on 6 March 2006. Paragraph 3.1 of the minutes of that meeting, which refers to information and sharing of ideas on Conference projects in the context of the IDB programme on regional public goods, states that a new project, being coordinated by Argentina, on the updating of the methodology used to measure poverty in the region should be presented to IDB by 30 June 2006.

2. Member countries of the Group and names of participants

The membership of the Group is still being defined; meanwhile a tentative promotion board has been set up, consisting of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay.

3. Brief description of the Group's terms of reference

Objectives. The general objective consists in expanding and improving statistical data sources and methodological bases for the preparation of poverty indicators.

The initial stages of a project that includes two subprojects for poverty measurement are being worked out. (i) Updating of the poverty line methodology and (ii) updating of non-monetary methodologies.

The specific goals of the subproject relating to the updating of the poverty line methodology are:

- To compare and assess the household income and expenditure surveys as data sources.
- To evaluate regional experience in poverty measurement according to the poverty line method and the use of other methods, such as unmet basic needs (UBN) indicators.
- To evaluate through empirical evidence the restrictions that the methodology for recording expenditure imposes on its use as a welfare variable for measuring poverty.
- To design an instrument that can measure poverty through expenditure by also considering transfers in kind, both public and private.
- To evaluate, through a pilot test in the field, the feasibility of using the questionnaire so designed.

The specific goals of the subproject relating to updating of non-monetary methodologies are:

- To evaluate regional experience in poverty measurement with non-monetary information.
- To develop measurement methodologies that are compatible with monetary measurements through conceptual harmonization of the indicators from both sources.

- To study methodologies for estimating poverty in small areas using models that combine census and survey information in order to generate indicators for follow-up.
- To design a non-monetary poverty measure based on regular sources of harmonized statistical information
- To validate the harmonized non-monetary poverty measure through a pilot test with field work in various countries.

Activities: Activities for both subprojects will be carried out in a number of stages.

In the case of the subproject for the update of the poverty line methodology, the stages are as follows:

- Comparison of the conceptual and methodological frameworks of household income and expenditure surveys indicating similarities and differences.
- Review of experiences: collection of national information, comparative empirical evaluation of all specific aspects of the development of poverty line methodology.
- Collection of background information and empirical evaluation in the expenditure surveys of the region and the use of expenditure as a welfare variable for measuring poverty.
- Design of a questionnaire that includes instruments that can resolve the methodological obstacles and that include a module for social transfers in kind.
- Implementation of a pilot test in all participating countries.

In the case of the subproject for the update of non-monetary methodologies, the stages are:

- Review of experiences consisting of collection of national information and a comparative methodological evaluation.
- Design of a harmonized measure.
- Validation test of the harmonized measure.
- Formulation of a definitive methodology through collection of conceptual discussions; evaluation of empirical experiences; diagnosis of the validation test and agreement on recommendations for implementation at the regional level.

Expected outputs for submission at the fourth meeting of the Conference. The Working Group will present a technical document for discussion.

4. Description of the activities carried out

The Working Group will present the first draft of the project for poverty measurement.

5. Forthcoming Activities

Official establishment of the Working Group on Poverty.

Receipt of comments from the countries on the project document, preparation of the project document; timelines of the planned activities; preparation of a definitive budget, setting out clearly how the resources would be distributed and covering recruitment of consultants, holding of seminars and other activities.

Beginning of activities in two priority areas: Extension of the study on the estimation methodology for small areas, combining information from censuses and surveys with a view to the preparation of the population and housing censuses of the 2010 round; and comparison and evaluation of recent experiences in income and expenditure surveys in the region, including the quantification of transfers received by households.