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**PROGRESS REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR IMPROVING THEIR OPERATIONS**

I. BACKGROUND

This report was commissioned by the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) at its eleventh meeting, when it adopted the following agreement relating to the performance of the working groups:

“Agrees to request the secretariat of the Conference to prepare a detailed report evaluating the performance of each working group and identifying in each case the relevant strengths and weaknesses. This report, which will be submitted at the twelfth meeting of the Executive Committee, will take into account the Report on the review of the operating modalities of the working groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, which was presented at the tenth meeting of the Executive Committee, held in Havana from 6 to 8 April 2011; the document will contain detailed information in particular on the work carried out by the coordinating country and members of each group, the objectives attained, possible synergies or duplications with respect to other groups, the outputs delivered, the timeframe and the work still pending as set forth in the programme of activities of the respective groups; the report should also contain the necessary recommendations for improving the functioning of the working groups”.

At its third meeting, held in Santiago in June 2005, the Conference examined and adopted the Strategic Plan 2005-2015.¹ This Plan is designed to guide the work of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in generating official statistics in the region, in accordance with the objectives established in resolution 2000/7 of 25 July 2000 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.² It outlines the mission of the Statistical Conference, its vision for the period up to 2015, the strategic goals, the targets associated with each of those goals and the main lines of action for fulfilment of the targets. At that meeting, the Conference also set up working groups on different statistical topics, whose task is to translate the priorities identified in the Strategic Plan into lines of action and outputs and support their implementation.

At its fifth meeting, the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference examined and approved the document setting out the terms of reference of the working groups and the general guidelines relating to the organization of the latter.³ The guidelines established for the groups are summarized below:

- (a) Each working group will consist of a leader, a facilitator and representatives of the member States that wish to assist in its work.
- (b) Each group’s activities will be based on one of the four subprogrammes of work (institution-building; human resources development and training; development of statistical capacity; international coordination and regional harmonization).

¹ LC/L.2715/Rev.1, Santiago, 14 August 2007.

² Establishing the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (E/2000/INF/2/Add.2).

³ 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), Santiago, 8 November 2005.

- (c) Each working group will report on the progress of its activities to the interlocutor designated by the Executive Committee for the relevant subprogramme.
- (d) The leader is the representative of the country responsible for the group and, among other functions, is responsible for the following:
 - (i) Directing and coordinating the work of the group and in particular for building consensus and monitoring the corresponding thematic programme of work;
 - (ii) Preparing the documents to be submitted in due form and on a timely basis to the Executive Committee;
 - (iii) Encouraging all members of the group to participate;
 - (iv) Maintaining contact with the interlocutor designated by the Executive Committee;
 - (v) Promoting use of the virtual collaborative site for coordination and discussion of the group's work.
- (e) The facilitator is a national of the country which holds the chair of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC and is responsible for supporting the coordinating country in the working group's activities.
- (f) In defining its projects, each group must take into account the activities of the Programme of Work of the Statistical Conference and should consider any initiatives being pursued by different international groups.

At its fifth meeting, held in August 2009, the Conference reviewed the progress of the working groups' work and agreed to request the secretariat to produce a report on the operating modalities of the groups and to make recommendations for improving them. The report was presented and discussed at the tenth meeting of the Executive Committee.⁴ Following its assessment, some lines of action were identified for improving the performance of the working groups:

- (i) Ensuring that the activities of the working groups are focused on specific and realistic goals;
- (ii) Working more closely with the Knowledge Transfer Network to conduct training activities;
- (iii) Adopting measures for promoting and facilitating the participation of the countries in working group activities;
- (iv) The coordinator countries and the technical secretariats of the working groups are requested to inform the Executive Committee of the units or areas of their agencies and the human and other resources involved in supporting the working groups;
- (v) The technical secretariats and the coordinator countries are requested to develop, to the extent possible, collaborative websites for conducting virtual meetings and workshops and for communication between working group members;
- (vi) The working groups are requested to submit to the Executive Committee half-yearly progress reports on their activities.

⁴ Report on the review of the operating modalities of the working groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/L.3285(CE.10/4)), Santiago, February 2010.

II. CURRENT STATUS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

First, as requested by the Executive Committee at its eleventh meeting, the strengths and weaknesses of the working groups' operations as revealed by the diagnostic analysis are listed below. This list is followed by a set of recommendations for improving the groups' performance and achievements.

The list of strengths and weaknesses in the operations of the working groups and the set of recommendations were established with reference to:

- (i) The Report on the review of the operating modalities of the working groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/L.3285(CE.10/4));
- (ii) The agreements adopted at the sixth meeting of the Conference and the eleventh meeting of the Executive Committee;
- (iii) The exchange of ideas between the members of the Executive Committee and the coordinators of the working groups during the working meeting of the Committee, held on 23 February 2013 in New York;
- (iv) The results of the questionnaire sent out to the coordinators of the working groups.⁵

A. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE WORKING GROUPS' OPERATIONS

1. Strengths

- (a) Countries have expressed great interest in joining the working groups, as they are perceived as useful for the exchange of best practices, access to new knowledge and as mechanisms for cooperation between countries and international organizations.
- (b) The working groups use the countries' ideas and experiences in a given area more fully and can generate synergies between countries to find the solution to various problems.
- (c) Electronic forums and other similar Internet mechanisms have been used to share documents and information on methodologies applied.
- (d) The working groups help to strengthen ties between ECLAC member countries and between subregions, as well as to foster South-South and North-South initiatives and generate various kinds of cooperation networks to the benefit of Conference members as a whole.
- (e) The groups also help to generate regional networks of experts in areas that are crucial to the development of official statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- (f) The member countries of the groups are familiar with the needs and priorities for the development of statistics in each country and the region and are therefore suitable interlocutors of the specialized technical international bodies and financing agencies. Hence, they can improve the chances of solving shared problems and serve as a link between countries and agencies.

⁵ Report on the activities carried out by the working groups (LC/L.3613(CE.12/4)).

2. Weaknesses

- (a) In many cases, the actual support provided by the member countries of the groups in implementing the tasks is weak.
- (b) The experts that are members of the working groups have a heavy work load within their own institution, and are therefore unable to participate more fully in the work of the group; Moreover, not enough priority or time is accorded for the work of the officials involved in the working groups.
- (c) The high turnover in the participants that attend the meetings and activities of the Working Group on International Classifications hinders the transmission of knowledge and commitments and the required follow-up to the tasks and agreements reached.
- (d) The management staff of the national statistical institutes are not familiar with the working group's regular activities or the tasks and responsibilities that fall to the focal points in each member country.
- (e) The agenda of issues to be addressed by the working group is vast. In many cases, the working groups were developed as operating and coordination groups for a specific thematic area. Thus, their programmes usually incorporate most of the statistical activities carried out by different stakeholders in a given area in the region and the working groups have tackled a very broad agenda of issues and goals.
- (f) Failure to prioritize goals and to set clear, measurable targets within the deadline of the biennial programme has, in many cases, made it more difficult to achieve those goals.
- (g) The level of involvement of the countries of the English-speaking Caribbean in the working groups is very low.
- (h) The coordinating countries are not always act sufficiently proactive in terms of fostering participation in, and active contribution to, the working groups' tasks. The consensus is that the effective implementation of the activities and the achievement of the targets depend on the group leader's commitment and proactiveness.
- (i) The level of participation by other important national agencies in the different activities of the working groups, whether as users or producers of statistics, remains limited.
- (j) Internet-based communication mechanisms are underutilized for the organization of working meetings. Moreover, there is very limited participation by experts of the member countries in the electronic forums of the working groups.
- (k) There is scant use of online training courses.
- (l) In most cases, the working groups have not recognized the potential of the Knowledge Transfer Network for promoting and supporting their activities and are not in constant touch with the Network.
- (m) Few projects have been generated in search of external financing; hence the difficulty in implementing the various activities.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. General recommendations

The Statistical Conference of the Americas should consider adopting a set of guiding principles to strengthen the performance of the working groups, thereby optimizing the execution of their activities and enhancing their achievements. The basic guidelines of these principles are set out below:

- (a) The working groups are organizational arrangements whereby member countries of the Statistical Conference of the Americas jointly tackle a problem or issue in one of the four areas of the

Strategic Plan 2005-2015: Institution-building; human resources and training; development of statistical capacity; coordination and cooperation between member countries of the Conference and international bodies.

- (b) The working groups are open to all countries that wish to take part; the latter must indicate explicitly what form their commitment towards achieving the goals of the working group will take, what resources in terms of man-hours of experts they will contribute or any other resources they may wish to place at the disposal of the working group; This implies a commitment on the part of the national statistical offices to incorporate in their usual work programme the time that the experts will need to devote to the relevant working group.
- (c) Each working group will have a coordinating country, designated by its member countries and whose duties will be as follows:
 - (i) To coordinate and agree on the preparation of the corresponding biennial programme of work;
 - (ii) To coordinate the group's work relating to the biennial programme and monitor its implementation;
 - (iii) To coordinate with the technical secretariat the support work for the implementation of the biennial programme;
 - (iv) To encourage all members of the group to participate;
 - (v) To keep in touch with the Executive Committee through the mechanisms that this Committee may decide on;
 - (vi) To maintain regular contact with the Knowledge Transfer Network and to promote the use of its virtual platform for the coordination and discussion of the group's work.
- (d) Each working group shall have a technical secretariat the services of which will be provided by an international organization and whose functions shall be as follows:
 - (i) To provide specialized technical support to the working group in the relevant thematic area;
 - (ii) To support the working group in formulating projects and identifying and seeking financing for these projects;
 - (iii) To facilitate coordination between the countries of the Statistical Conference and international bodies that specialize in the relevant thematic areas;
 - (iv) The technical secretariats of the working groups shall decide on the starting date for implementation of the biennial programme, the resources required in terms of the number of man-hours by experts and other supports made available for the work of the working group.
- (e) The working groups shall have a biennial programme to describe the specific goals and attainable targets during the mandate and that are measurable using mid-term and final evaluations.
- (f) It is recommended that each working group formulate a project, based on its programme of work to enable it to manage the plan of activities and its funding in order to fulfil the proposed targets.
- (g) At the relevant meeting of the Conference, the latter shall have before it for consideration the report on implementation of the biennial programme and shall, subject to the Executive Committee's report and recommendation, determine whether the mandate of the working group should be extended for the next biennial period and, if so, shall set the terms of reference for that extended period.

- (h) In addition to the working groups, the Executive Committee may appoint other coordinating and working bodies to carry out specific mandates. In particular, it may, if necessary, set up task forces or “ad hoc” groups, such as a group of experts to maintain regular contact and generate a report, conduct tasks or obtain given outputs in relation to specific topics or problems. Subsequently, such groups would report to the Executive Committee, within a previously specified time frame.⁶
- (i) The Executive Committee, with support from the Secretariat of the Conference, is responsible for monitoring the operations of the working groups and for providing support for their activities. Accordingly, it is proposed that the following measures be implemented:
- (i) Under the leadership and coordination of the Chair of the Executive Committee, each of the members of a given working group must be assigned responsibilities for monitoring and supporting the group’s activities;
 - (ii) The Executive Committee must carry out a quarterly meeting, whether face-to-face or by video-conference, to monitor fulfilment of the programme of activities of the groups and to adopt and propose measures as appropriate;
 - (iii) At least two video-conferences should be held each year with the international bodies operating in the region to discuss ways of supporting the work of the working groups;
 - (iv) Steps should be taken to hold discussion forums to identify and build thematic synergies between groups and cross-cutting collaborative arrangements among their members.
- (j) The working groups should always consider, in their programme of work, activities that promote the participation of the English-speaking Caribbean countries along with Haiti and should have translated into English all the documents that they produce.
- (k) The working groups will be responsible for updating their page on the website of the Statistical Conference of the Americas and the Knowledge Transfer Network in order to disseminate their activities, report on advances and results of their work and coordinate with the Network in organizing and running online training courses.
- (l) It is recommended that the necessary measures for bringing their operations and work in line with earlier guidelines be adopted before the seventh meeting of the Statistical Conference. Accordingly, the working groups should present their biennial programme 2014-2015 by 31 August 2013 at the latest in order to receive feedback from the Executive Committee.
- (m) A formal mechanism should be established for recognizing the best initiatives developed by the working groups. This recognition should be carried out every other year during the meeting of the Conference.

2. Specific recommendations

This section proposes specific lines of action for improving the operations of each of the working groups. These suggestions seek merely to stimulate reflection by the Executive Committee and to encourage the members of the working groups to assume full responsibility for the measures adopted.

⁶ In this regard, see Rules and Procedures Governing the Work of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) (ECE/CES/2007/8), 2007.

The proposals presented below are based on the status reports submitted by the working groups at the eleventh meeting of the Executive Committee, held in Quito in July 2012, on the information contained in questionnaires on the operations of the working groups and on the discussions held by the Executive Committee on 23 February 2013 in New York with representatives of 12 of the 13 coordinating countries of the working groups and in some cases also on bilateral meetings with the coordinating countries.

(a) Working group on institution-building

This working group is expected to meet the targets posed for 2012-2013. If all or most of these targets are met, this working group will be able to finalize its activities by the end of 2013; a coordination mechanism will then need to be found and put into practice to support and monitor the implementation of the Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular for the realization of global assessments of countries in the region.

(b) Working Group on National Accounts

This group has an extremely broad programme of work as regards the issues that it seeks to cover; it should therefore better target its goals and activities. It should continue to prepare the new modules of the advanced course on national accounts with support from the countries and international organizations. This could enrich the content and activities of the Knowledge Transfer Network and generate appropriate inter-group synergies.

(c) Working Group on Labour-Market Indicators

This Working Group is expected to meet its targets. If so, its activities can be brought to a close by the end of 2013, unless another central goal is put forward for consideration by the Conference for the biennium 2014-2015.

(d) Working Group on Household Surveys

It is recommended that the expected achievements for this year be directed towards the first product "Assessment of the degree of integration between the household surveys produced by member countries and the criteria for constructing the framework for the integrated household survey system and using master sampling frames". For the biennium 2014-2015, the working group should set more limited goals and focus on preparing a regional strategy for the implementation of an integrated system of household surveys in the countries of the region.

(e) Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals

It is recommended that the working group carry out an evaluation with a view to targeting its goals and activities, bearing in mind that there are only two years left before the target date for fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, in terms of the discussions and decisions that are adopted by the United Nations on the continuity of these studies beyond 2015, this working group should at the appropriate time consider the prospects and outlook for its operations in the future.

(f) The Working Group on Censuses

In addition to its role in coordinating the relevant activities carried out by international organizations in the region, this working group should strive to target its goals and activities so as to

achieve gains for the period 2014-2015. Its participation in analysing census data will need to be coordinated with the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE) - Population Division of ECLAC. In addition, the establishment of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean gives this Working Group the opportunity to be present and to participate in the discussions and work of this new body.

(g) Working Group on Statistics on Childhood and Adolescence

The programme of this recently created Working Group has very broad goals. Notwithstanding its role as technical secretariat, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) did not provide very active support. This working group would do well to focus its 2014-2015 programme of activities on a more limited number of goals and targets.

(h) Working Group on Information and Communications Technologies

This working group expects to have met the goals of the 2012-2013 biennial programme. It has recently prepared a draft programme of work for 2014-2015, which will be presented for review and endorsement at the seventh meeting of the Conference.

(i) Working Group on Agricultural Statistics

This working group was set up recently and should continue to focus its activities on supporting the plan for implementation of the global strategy in the region and fund-raising for the pursuit of its activities. Within this framework, it may continue to act as the regional steering committee for implementation of the Global Strategy in Latin America and the Caribbean.

(j) Working Group on Gender Statistics

This working group already has a series of important consolidated activities, including international meetings and the provision of technical assistance and training to countries and this level of activity is expected to be maintained in these areas. The focus of the group's activities should be to place an economic value on unpaid work, set up a satellite account for the region, disseminate the guidelines prepared by the Friends of the Chair group for generating statistics on violence against women, and develop a set of gender-sensitive indicators for consideration when defining the sustainable development goals within the framework of the United Nations.

(k) Working Group on Environmental Statistics

This Group's work modality should be maintained and its targets should be pursued fundamentally through the execution of the regional public goods project "Development and strengthening of official environmental statistics by creating a regional framework in Latin America and the Caribbean". The Working Group should take advantage of face-to-face meetings relating to the project to review its own terms of reference and look at the goals for the 2014-2015 biennium.

(l) Working Group on Harmonization of Statistics on Income Poverty and Public Transfers

This Working Group needs to assess the real possibilities of continuing its operations over the period 2014-2015 with the focus on the preparation of a proposal for the harmonization of poverty measurement in the countries of the region. This assessment should examine not only the extent to which countries are committed to participating but also whether sufficient funding will be available over time for the conduct of the relevant workshops and studies.

(m) Working Group on International Classifications

Although this recently created working group has well-defined overall goals and specific goals, it has a very broad programme of activities and its targets need to be clearly spelled out. It should focus on management in order to obtain funding for implementation of the project on adoption and adaptation of socioeconomic classifiers in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Even so, this working group could develop an online course on classifiers over the long term as a tool that will be very useful for providing training and horizontal technical assistance; at the same time, it can be a beneficiary of the online course being prepared within the framework of the Project entitled “Regional statistical framework for the directories of businesses and establishments”.

(n) Knowledge Transfer Network

Strictly speaking, the Knowledge Transfer Network is not a working group but rather a coordination unit that supports the training activities of all the working groups, fosters transfer of the best possible knowledge and promotes and organizes online training activities. As agreed at the last meeting of the Executive Committee, Mexico will hand over responsibility of the Coordination Unit of the Knowledge Transfer Network and Colombia has expressed its willingness to take over. The twelfth meeting of the Executive Committee will have to decide on the proposal for a new head of the Coordination Unit and the members of its Advisory Committee as well as on the deadlines for the change in coordination and the establishment of priorities for the Network for the new period.

C. CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The implementation of the recommendations set out above will depend on a series of factors. All the participants of the Conference will need to be fully aware of these factors, and should, in each case, adopt the measures necessary to ensure that they are taken fully into account.

- (i) Countries must pledge to allow their officials to make a real contribution to the work of the working group;
- (ii) The coordinating country of the working group must play a proactive role and effective resources—in terms of time allocated from officials’ regular working day— must be made available;
- (iii) A programme with clearly defined goals and specific, measurable targets should be adopted for a two-year period;
- (iv) A technical secretariat with well-defined functions and commitments must be appointed;
- (v) All relevant national and international stakeholders in the region must participate actively;
- (vi) The Executive Committee, with the assistance of the secretariat, must assess and actively and effectively monitor the work of the working groups.