ECLAC

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Joint Meeting ECLAC/OAS on Statistical Matters

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PROGRAMME OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK FOR

SUBPROGRAMME 3: STATISTICS AND SOCIAL AND POVERTY INDICATORS

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PROPOSAL TO CONTINUE AND EXPAND SUBPROGRAMME 3
IN THE BIENNIAL 1997-1998

SUBPROGRAMME 3: Statistics and social and poverty indicators

The first Joint OAS/ECLAC Meeting on Statistical Matters, held in Santiago, Chile, from 11 to 14 October 1994, stressed the need to move ahead in creating an appropriate system of indicators to facilitate the evaluation and monitoring of changes in the population’s living conditions.

Therefore, it approved a subprogramme of work on social and poverty statistics and indicators for the period 1995-1996 aimed at conducting activities that would help improve the quality and timeliness of the social statistics regularly generated by the countries of the region, while expanding their subject and territorial coverage with a view to integrating them into a coherent conceptual and analytic framework. The elements of the subprogramme related in particular to improving the household surveys conducted in Latin American and Caribbean countries, using the information generated by the surveys and creating and utilizing databases with information derived from the population and housing censuses conducted around 1990.

For the biennium 1997-1998, the plan is to continue this line of work, while incorporating new activities that will help to widen and deepen the progress achieved in these areas. Described below are some of the activities that could form part of a provisional programme of work in the area of social statistics and indicators; the opinions and suggestions of the Directors in this regard are solicited.

Programme element 3.1: Improvement of household surveys in the countries of the region.

1. The joint project developed by ECLAC, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank for improving household surveys in Latin America will shortly get under way. As part of the project, regional and activities are being planned to enhance the quality, timeliness, coverage and relevance of the data on living conditions generated by such surveys. Argentina, El Salvador, Paraguay and Peru will participate in the first phase of the project; later, it is hoped that the project will expand to include the other countries of the region.

2. Among the regional activities contemplated under this project are a set of workshops or seminars (two per year), to be coordinated by ECLAC. The workshops are to take place in Argentina and Mexico with the full collaboration of the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses of Argentina (INDEC) and the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics of Mexico (INEGI). The purpose of the workshops is to analyze methodological aspects of Latin American survey systems and the generation of social indicators for policy design, monitoring and evaluation. Workshop participants will be specialists from national statistical offices and experts from the region.
3. In addition, there is a plan to initiate longitudinal studies (household panel) in a few countries -as pilot studies for the region- and to carry out special surveys for follow-up and evaluation of the impact of specific social programmes, with the collaboration of Statistics Canada, EUROSTAT and European countries.

**Programme element 3.2: Use of household survey data.**

4. It is planned to step up activities to promote better and fuller use of household survey data. This involves challenges not only in dissemination of the basic data, but also in the design of appropriate economic and social indicators for evaluating living conditions in different strata of the population. In this regard, ECLAC will continue to collaborate with INEGI of Mexico in holding an International Workshop on Poverty once a year (covering concepts, methodologies and techniques of measurement), primarily to train professionals from national statistical offices in the region.

5. In addition, following the recommendations of the Group of Experts of the United Nations Statistical Commission, ECLAC, in collaboration with other United Nations regional commissions, will organize a world seminar on measures of poverty, tentatively scheduled for April 1997. The conference or seminar is conceived as an opportunity for experts from various regions with experience in measuring poverty to compare the concepts and methodologies they are using in order to identify areas of potential improvement in the methods, data sources and statistical instruments that Governments use to monitor programmes.

6. ECLAC will also continue to carry out new studies in conjunction with countries of the region on the quantification of poverty and the description and analysis of characteristics of impoverished groups. Studies of this kind are already being done in collaboration with the Governments of Chile and Mexico and most recently Brazil, and technical assistance has been provided to a number of other countries (including Bolivia, Costa Rica and Venezuela) on calculating the basic food basket and estimating poverty lines. ECLAC is quite willing to expand this activity in response to interest on the part of the Directors of Statistics.

7. With regard to an exchange of experiences in this area, it is planned to give wide dissemination to the studies on measuring and analyzing poverty done under the project on improving socio-economic information systems carried out by the National Institute of Statistics of Uruguay with the collaboration of ECLAC as executing agency and with funding from IDB.

8. ECLAC will also continue to carry out the project funded by the Government of the Netherlands on indicators for social policy formulation in Latin America and the Caribbean. It will also continue to publish annually the *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean*, which draws heavily on the household surveys for its basic data.
9. In relation specifically to the Central American countries, it will be helpful to assess what progress has been made on the project being carried out in collaboration with OAS on defining a system of social and poverty indicators and to decide what the next logical steps should be to follow up the project. At this respect, in the Technical Meeting to revise Project SISPO, held in Panama, on August 29 - 30, 1996, it was agreed to request the "Secretaría de Integración Social (SISCA) to support such Project, revise and redraft its contents and coordinate its implementation among the countries of the Centralamerican Isthmus. Afterwards, the regional countries met with Costa Rica, in coordination with SISCA, in order to put into action a set of activities in the field of social indicators to be held in the biennium 1997-98. The selection of such activities will be completed before the end of the year, previous to consultations.

10. Lastly, on the subject of social indicators, efforts will be made to concretize an initiative on the part of the Government of Denmark to support an exercise in one or two countries of the region that would entail compiling the indicators defined as meaningful for following up on the goals set at summits organized by the United Nations in recent years.

11. Efforts will be made to widen and deepen contacts with the developed countries on social and demographic statistics topics of special interest to the region. In particular, an organized follow-up will be given to the events, technical materials and recommendations of the Conference of European Statisticians, and efforts will be made to promote interchange and participation by Latin American countries in some of the events included in the programme of work of the countries in the area of the Economic Commission for Europe for the period 1996/97 and 1997/98. The latter programme of work contains elements on social indicators, gender statistics, multi-purpose social surveys and income and expenditure surveys, administrative records for social and demographic statistics, population and housing censuses, statistics on employment, education, health, household welfare, poverty, inequality and other areas. In most of these areas, technical meetings are planned during the biennium, organized, inter alia, by the Economic Commission for Europe, EUROSTAT, OECD or the United Nations Statistical Division. There are more than 30 expert meetings, working group meetings or workshops scheduled by these agencies during the period.

Programme element 3.3: Construction and use of databases with information from population and housing censuses.

12. ECLAC and CELADE will continue to promote technical and methodological progress in the structuring of databases and the use of census information for purposes of diagnosis and evaluation of the social situation. In this regard, they plan to keep encouraging the countries of the region to do studies such as the preparation of maps of unmet basic needs and to exchange methodologies and experiences among themselves. In particular, research will continue on the indirect estimation of income
and poverty for small areas, using in complementary fashion censuses and household surveys and the diffusion of the experience developed with the INEI-Peru and the INE-Uruguay in the framework of the BID-CELADE Convention.

13. CELADE will make available to the countries the new version of REDATAM+ for Windows, as well as the application packages for the Geographic Information System (SIG) for the education (EDUPLAN), and health (ACCESS) sectors and for the generation and visualization of indicators (ZONPLAN).

14. At the same time, a regional programme will be proposed concerning preparation for the censuses of the year 2000; the programme will encourage methodological reflection, thematic analysis and the design of technical instruments for compiling, processing and disseminating information. CELADE will prepare a document with reflections and orientations on census management following fieldwork, taking into consideration the multiple problems that experience has shown in this phase. In this context, it seems very useful the experience acquired by the INE of Uruguay with respect to the processing of the population census with the scanner method, that allows the "intelligent" acknowledgement of characters (marks, pre-printed numbers, longhand numbers and longhand alphabetic posters). During the reading period of the questionnaires, that hopefully will end in March 1997, the INE has offered to the countries interested in learning this technique to visit the Institute.