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PROPOSED STRATEGIC PLAN, 2015-2025

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A. KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

1. Persistent gaps between the region's development and the level of official statistics

Latin America and the Caribbean has made significant progress on the economic, social and, to a lesser extent, environmental fronts in the past two decades. This progress has led to new demands for statistical information, in terms of coverage, higher levels of disaggregation and the need for data and indicators for emerging issues and for substantial improvements to the quality and timeliness of statistical information. Countries in the region have taken steps to modernize and strengthen their national statistical systems, each at its own pace and to different extents, but the changes made have not always been sufficient to meet the demands for statistical information, resulting in significant gaps.

2. Current situation of national statistical systems in the region

The significant variation in the development levels of the national statistical systems in Latin America and the Caribbean must be taken into account when identifying the key elements of official statistics in the region and the challenges those systems face.¹

In the last 20 years, significant progress has been made on institution-building, the integration of national statistical systems and the development of high quality statistics on a broad range of subjects. Yet some statistical bodies still carry out their functions in a precarious institutional framework with outdated laws that fail to reflect current realities and needs relating to the production and dissemination of statistics.

Many offices are understaffed and have a high turnover of highly qualified personnel. They therefore lack a steady pool of professional and technical staff that can work towards improving the quality of official statistics. This results in a weakening of technical capacity in some critical areas for statistical offices in the region, including in particular demography, sample design and statistical analysis.

Some countries have not yet managed to secure the resources they need to finance basic statistical operations or the budget sustainability that is essential to developing and implementing medium- and long-term programmes.

In many countries it has not been possible to develop new statistical operations to generate a continuous flow of statistical data and measurements in new areas and with the level of sectoral and territorial breakdown required to formulate and evaluate public policies and programmes. This is the case in particular for statistics on the environment, information and communications technology, services, current issues and micro- and small enterprises, among other areas. Furthermore, in several cases the sampling frames or the base years of measurement —basic elements to ensure the quality of the statistical operations— are very outdated.

¹ United Nations, *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean: development of official statistics in the region. Note by the Secretary-General* (E/CN.3/2010/16), New York, December 2009; and *Report of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean on statistical activities in Latin America and the Caribbean: recent achievements and next challenges Note by the Secretary-General* (E/CN.3/2015/19), New York, 2014.

Overcoming this set of challenges is all the more pressing given that in the period 2015-2025 the region will face the weighty, cross-cutting challenge of monitoring the post-2015 development agenda and executing three major statistical operations:

- Conducting the 2020 census round, which for some countries will mean carrying out their census operation in 2016.
- Implementing the System of National Accounts 2008 (SNA 2008), a task that some countries have only recently begun, while others are now moving on to the more complex aspects of the process.
- Implementing in stages the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA), a task that is proving challenging for many countries.

3. Statistical challenges relating to the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals

New, exacting demands will be made of official statistics with respect to monitoring the post-2015 development agenda. This agenda represents a vision of development that reflects national priorities and, therefore, many of the challenges associated with the development of good-quality official statistics in the region will arise from the need for data and indicators to monitor that agenda.

The international community has come together through the United Nations system to define the core content of an ambitious new development agenda framed by the sustainable development goals, referred to as the post-2015 development agenda. The aim of this agenda is to end extreme poverty in all its forms in the context of sustainable development and to have in place the building blocks of sustained prosperity for all. The agenda is designed to address the universal challenges of the twenty-first century: promoting sustainable development, supporting job-creating growth, protecting the environment and providing peace, security, justice, freedom and equity at all levels.²

According to the discussions carried out to date, the challenges arising from the post-2015 development agenda will include the following:³

- Large volumes of complex data will have to be collected for the indicators as the new agenda has significantly more goals and targets than the Millennium Development Goals. The goals and targets cover the three dimensions of sustainable development —economic, social and environmental— in addition to cross-cutting issues, such as governance, human rights, the empowerment of women and equality. Furthermore, the indicators will have to be duly disaggregated by age, sex, geographical location, socioeconomic status, disability and other factors, for many statistical areas.
- Progress will be required in underdeveloped areas, while others will need to be consolidated, for example, environmental statistics. Internationally comparable indicators will have to be defined

² United Nations, “Communiqué from the Meeting of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in Monrovia, Liberia”, Monrovia Communiqué of the High-Level Panel 1 February 2013.

³ United Nations, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development. The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, New York, 2013 [online] http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf.

on topics such as food security, sustainable agriculture, well-being, quality of education, lifelong learning opportunities, energy, inclusive and resilient cities, patterns of consumption and production, climate change, biodiversity, peaceful and inclusive societies and governance.

Monitoring the commitments of the post-2015 development agenda after 2015 will require a steady flow of good-quality, up-to-date, reliable and accessible data for the ongoing measurement of the indicators of progress towards the new goals and targets at the national, regional and global levels. The post-2015 development agenda therefore poses a tremendous challenge even for the most advanced statistical systems.

4. The data revolution as a challenge and an opportunity

The data revolution and the application of information technologies in the most diverse fields of economic, social and political life, in State and government administrations, in the education, health and recreation sectors, among many other areas, offer an invaluable opportunity to obtain timely data, which—once verified and deemed to be of suitably high quality— can be used to generate statistics in support of evidence-based decision-making processes. New technologies have led to an exponential increase in the volume and types of data available and have created unprecedented opportunities; however, to date these possibilities have not been sufficiently exploited in the field of official statistics.

According to the international statistics community, meeting the modern demands on statistics, while fulfilling time-frame and quality requirements, calls for a data revolution, that is, transforming the way that data are generated and used to drive development. A data revolution means an explosion in the volume of data, the speed with which they are produced, the number of producers, the dissemination of data and the range of issues covered, with qualitative data, citizen-generated data and data on subjective perceptions being gathered using new technologies, such as mobile telephones and the Internet of Things; in short, a growing demand for data on all sectors.⁴

This explosion in the volume of data will incorporate both traditional and new data sources. The constant use of telecommunications and other technologies on a mass scale continuously generates digital information that is potentially useful for official statistics.

However, these new opportunities for the mass-scale, efficient use of data through technologies opened up by the data revolution, will require new tools and methods to capture, manage and process information systematically, as well as a legal framework to build the institutions needed for the use of those data in decision-making. It will also be necessary to establish mechanisms to share technologies and best practices and to develop and promote a global consensus on principles and standards to generate timely, good-quality statistical information.

5. Strategies for responding to old and new challenges

The persistent weakness of the national statistical systems and offices of several countries—outdated legal frameworks, a severe lack of trained staff and insufficient, unreliable financial resources—foregrounds the pressing need to urge governments in the region to build the institutional frameworks

⁴ United Nations, *A World that Counts. Mobilising the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development*, November 2014 [online] <http://www.undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/A-World-That-Counts2.pdf>.

required for national statistical systems to comply fully with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics of the United Nations

It bears repeating that official statistics are a highly valuable public good, necessary for evidence-based decision-making and safeguarding the accountability and transparency of public administration. The institutional and economic responsibility for ensuring that statistical production and distribution processes match the needs of society and citizens therefore rests with the State.

At the same time, joint action must be taken by the international organizations to support the process of creating and strengthening the capacities of national statistical systems, especially in the areas with the greatest weaknesses or gaps.

The advent of new technologies has led to a greater variety of information-gathering mechanisms and sources, but there remain unresolved challenges regarding the use of unofficial data for producing official statistics. Huge efforts are still required to harmonize and verify the reliability of the large volumes of information being generated (big data) in order to ensure that the statistics produced comply with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

One very important aspect of the data revolution and the use of data for producing official statistics is accessibility to sources of information. In this connection, it would be of great interest to the region to support open data initiatives, which explicitly recognize the social value as a public good of making data available to the public and to statistical offices.

A central challenge for statistical offices is to transform their processes to embrace a new production model that allows for the intensive use of data from administrative records and new sources associated with the data revolution. This new model poses its own considerable challenges with respect to introducing and furthering the application of modern methods of results-based management.

The aforementioned challenges can be addressed only by creating synergies between actors in the statistical system in order to help strengthen the countries' capacities in this field with a view to achieving institutionally robust and sustainable national statistical systems with appropriate governance mechanisms for official and unofficial statistics.

In order to strengthen basic statistics and develop the measurement of emerging issues, strategies for statistical development will have to be formulated and implemented in various areas and must be included as part of each country's national development strategy. Creating such a virtuous link will promote the comprehensive strengthening of national statistical systems, providing sufficient resources to ensure that they are sustainable and hence have the capacity to generate the statistical information that the countries require.

The national statistical systems, led by national statistical offices and with the support and close cooperation of international organizations, should steer the national, regional and global follow-up process with a view to collecting, analysing and exchanging the statistical data required to monitor the post-2015 development agenda.

Decision makers and, more generally, public and private actors in each country, must be made aware that taking full advantage of the possibilities offered by the data revolution requires significant and sustained investment in national statistical capacity, a strong spirit of cooperation and coordination

efforts, in the technical and institutional spheres, in order to increase the coverage, quality, disaggregation and frequency of data under a model that is sustainable over time.

To this end, information and advocacy measures are needed to persuade governments in the region of the importance of statistics for the formulation and monitoring of public policies and to sensitize them to the need to maintain a steady and increasing flow of financing for the operation of national statistical systems in general and statistical offices in particular.

B. PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The purpose of the strategic plan 2015-2025 is to guide the activities of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in support of the development of official statistics in the region, in accordance with the objectives established in United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/7 of 25 July 2000.⁵ In accordance with the provisions of the resolution that establishes it, the Statistical Conference of the Americas, in its capacity as a subsidiary body of ECLAC, has the following objectives:⁶

- To promote the development and improvement of national statistics and work to ensure that they are comparable internationally, bearing in mind the recommendations of the United Nations Statistical Commission, the specialized agencies and other relevant organizations.
- To promote international, regional and bilateral cooperation among national offices and international and regional agencies.
- To draw up a biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities, to meet the demands of the countries of the region, subject to the availability of resources.

In consideration of the above, the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC is resolved to give impetus to the fulfilment of its mandate to be “a subsidiary body of the Commission that shall contribute to the progress of policies on statistics and statistical activities in the countries of the region” (resolution 2000/7). The members of the Statistical Conference of the Americas are the member countries of ECLAC, represented by directors or chiefs of the national statistical offices, accompanied by high-level authorities of the public institutions that produce and disseminate the country’s official statistics.

This document takes into account the main priorities raised by members of the Conference at its previous meetings and the trends emerging from various studies on the principal challenges facing the region’s national statistical systems. These priorities and trends have been analysed in preparing this proposed strategic plan, which sets out the values, mission, vision, strategic goals, specific goals and main lines of action, providing a focus for the Conference’s efforts at its meetings to be held from 2015 to 2025. It also identifies some broad guidelines to help implement this strategic plan.

A document of this nature with a medium- to long-term vision for the development of official statistics in the region is both necessary and useful since new demands for information are emerging continuously from the transformation of economic and social structure that is part of the development

⁵ Establishing the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (E/2000/INF/2/Add.2).

⁶ Ibid.

process of the region's countries and from the challenges of globalization, new technologies and the data revolution. In addition, the challenges deriving from monitoring the post-2015 development agenda will also have to be tackled in the period under consideration. Moreover, the region's statistical products must meet the most rigorous standards in terms of quality, timeliness and completeness.

Therefore, in view of the development level of statistical production and the importance of the processes of harmonization and regional integration in Latin America and the Caribbean, the region should set targets that aspire to international best practices and the development and use of common tools and systems. This strategic plan aims to outline those targets.

The 10-year time frame chosen for the strategic vision allows for the fact that national statistical systems in all countries of the region will have to address some major challenges by 2025, including the development of a statistical information system to monitor the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda; the preparation and execution of the 2020 round of population censuses; and the implementation of SNA 2008 and SEEA.

The Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC acknowledges that the diversity of situations in the member countries of the region means that convergence towards that goal of regional excellence will take place in stages and highlights that there is a huge potential for making use of the experiences and progress achieved in each of the countries of the region. The Conference should therefore encourage countries and the different stakeholders in national statistical systems to participate and cooperate in its work.

C. VALUES, MISSION AND VISION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

1. Values

The Statistical Conference of the Americas will be guided by the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission,⁷ and by the Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean, adopted by the Conference at its sixth meeting held in Bávaro, Dominican Republic, from 16 to 18 November 2011.⁸

2. Mission

The Statistical Conference of the Americas is a subsidiary body of ECLAC whose mission is to be the intergovernmental body that coordinates statistical activities in Latin America and the Caribbean with a view to improving the official statistics of each country and their international comparability by encouraging the strengthening of national statistical offices and systems, the adoption of international statistical standards and best practices, and international, regional, horizontal and South-South cooperation.

⁷ United Nations, Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (A/RES/68/261) [online] <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/fundprinciples.aspx>.

⁸ Proposal for a Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean and Implementation Plan for 2012-2013 (LC/L.3384(CEA.6/12) [online] <http://www.cepal.org/publicaciones/xml/3/44893/LCL3384i.pdf>.

3. Vision for 2025

The Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC will consolidate its position as the main forum for regional and international cooperation and coordination on official statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially with regard to developing the capacities of national statistical systems to respond effectively to the challenges of modernizing and strengthening their legal and management frameworks, to close the gaps in coverage and quality that persist in various thematic fields and to prepare the statistics that will be required for monitoring the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda.

D. STRATEGIC AND SPECIFIC GOALS

The strategic and specific goals of the strategic plan are presented below.

Strategic goal 1: To strengthen the organization and management practices of the national statistical offices and the integration and coordination of national statistical systems.

Specific goal 1: To promote the dissemination and implementation of international standards and best practices for the management of national statistical offices and the integration and coordination of national statistical systems.

Specific goal 2: To promote greater effectiveness and efficiency in the processes of production and dissemination of statistics through the use of new data sources and modernization of the production function.

Strategic goal 2: To foster the development of technical and methodological capacities in order to generate high-quality statistical information.

Specific goal 1: To promote continuous training and learning for staff at statistical offices.

Specific goal 2: To promote the exchange of information, best practices and methodological innovations between the members of the regional statistical community.

Strategic goal 3: To foster coordination and cooperation between the member countries of the Statistical Conference of the Americas and international organizations.

Specific goal 1: To promote horizontal cooperation among the member countries of the Conference.

Specific goal 2: To promote coordination and cooperation between the Conference and the other subsidiary bodies of ECLAC.

Specific goal 3: To promote international cooperation.

E. GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The strategic plan will be implemented through the following channels.

1. Biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities

The biennial programme is a key element in attaining the goals of the strategic plan. The programme sums up the specific aims for a two-year period, which should be consistent with one or more of the three strategic goals of the plan and contain clear guidelines to provide direction and stimulate concrete action by countries, international, regional and subregional organizations and the different coordination and cooperation bodies created for these purposes (for example, working groups and expert committees).

2. Regional projects that leverage the efforts of all Conference stakeholders in order to accomplish the goals of the strategic plan

In keeping with the purposes of the strategic plan, projects with a regional or subregional scope and impact should be identified and developed for joint action by the member countries of the Conference, international and subregional organizations or for implementation through horizontal cooperation. The aim is to focus the efforts and limited resources of the regional statistical community on a few high-impact projects that will lead to significant improvements in national statistical systems, in particular by updating and strengthening institutional legal frameworks, ensuring the availability of a sufficient number of qualified staff and continuously upgrading the quality, efficiency and public credibility of the statistics produced.

3. Mobilization of international resources in support of the priorities and projects of the strategic plan

The Executive Committee of the Conference will take the necessary action to ensure that its strategic plan allows multilateral and subregional organizations to coordinate their activities in the region in the best way possible. This coordination will focus on objectives and activities that clearly reflect the identified priorities.

4. Continuous monitoring of the strategic plan

Given the plan's long time frame, it was decided that a mechanism should be established to provide for a detailed, ongoing assessment of the progress made towards achieving the objectives set out in the plan. It is the responsibility of the Executive Committee of the Conference to take the necessary steps to ensure that intermediary reports are prepared every two bienniums (that is, every four years) and that a final report is prepared at the end of the 10-year period. This measure aims to reassess the specific priorities of each strategic goal, propose measures to increase the participation of all stakeholders in working towards the goals of the strategic plan and review possible changes and new challenges as they arise during the implementation period.

5. Working groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas

The member countries of the Statistical Conference of the Americas set up working groups as a way to jointly tackle problems or issues relating to the goals of the strategic plan.

Working groups are formed at the request of a group of countries. Such a request is evaluated by the Executive Committee which, if it considers the step necessary and justified, will present the proposal for endorsement at the following meeting of the Conference. Meanwhile, the requesting countries prepare the working group's terms of reference and draft programme of work. Working groups are open to all countries that wish to join. The members must indicate explicitly what form their commitment to achieving the goals of the working group will take and what resources they will contribute in terms of expert hours or other inputs.

Each working group has a biennial programme setting forth specific goals and attainable targets during its mandate; these must be measurable using mid-term and final evaluations. It is recommended that each group formulate its programme of work taking account of the human resources that member countries can contribute and the funding available in order to fulfil the proposed targets. Ideally, programmes of work should be submitted with their respective budget.

The general operations of the working groups are set out in the document *Proposed operational guidelines for the working groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC* (LC/L.3694(CEA.7/4)), adopted by the Conference of the Americas at its seventh meeting.