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## **EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2005-2015<sup>1</sup>**

15-01121

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<sup>1</sup> Document prepared by Máximo Aguilera, consultant at Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), commissioned by the secretariat of the Statistical Conference of the Americas.

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## A. BACKGROUND

1. This report was prepared pursuant to the wishes expressed by some member countries of the Statistical Conference of the Americas for a global assessment of the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2005-2015. Firstly, the report presents some basic background information on the goals of the Statistical Conference of the Americas and the process that led the Conference to draw up a strategic plan. This gives some insight into how the goals and lines of action of the Plan were chosen, and into the most important outputs and expected achievements.
2. The Organization of American States (OAS) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) began holding Joint Meetings on Statistical Matters in 1994. In its resolution 34, of 8 October 1998, the Permanent Executive Committee of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development of OAS decided to put an end to the existence, within the Organization of American States, of the Inter-American Statistical Conference. The Permanent Executive Committee of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development of OAS entrusted the representatives of the statistical offices of Canada, Mexico and Peru and the ECLAC secretariat with the task of preparing a proposal on the organization and operation of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. The proposal was improved and approved by consensus at the Meeting of Directors of Statistics of the Americas, held at ECLAC headquarters, from 24 to 26 March 1999.
3. Having examined the proposal, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, in its resolution 2000/7, of 25 July 2000, approved the establishment, as one of the subsidiary bodies of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, with the following objectives:
  - (a) 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.
  - (b) To promote international, regional and bilateral cooperation among national offices and international and regional agencies.
  - (c) 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.
4. At its first two meetings (2001 and 2003) the Conference set up its participatory bodies, drafted the first two regional programmes of work and began to develop various regional cooperation projects, based in particular on the work of ECLAC. It was necessary to build on these achievements to ensure that the Conference had a clearly defined mandate as the intergovernmental body that guides and directs the production of statistics in the Latin American and Caribbean countries. To encourage the development of the Conference in this direction, the Chair and the secretariat presented the document "Reflections on the meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean"<sup>2</sup> at the fourth meeting of the Executive Committee, held in Dallas, United States, in November 2004. The document raises the need to work out long-term strategic guidelines, for the period up to 2015, on the production and consolidation of statistics to meet the countries' requirements in the light of economic and social change, as well as the commitments undertaken by Governments vis-à-vis their citizens and the international community. It also notes that the achievement of this objective is contingent on the application of a broader technical and institutional approach and the formulation of a

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<sup>2</sup> LC/L.2215

plan of action to serve as a frame of reference for regional statistical activities. In that connection, it recognizes that the establishment of long-term goals involves defining a strategy, determining the activities to be carried out and identifying the necessary resources. Consequently, the Statistical Conference of the Americas should formulate a medium-term plan.

5. At the third meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, held in Santiago, in June 2005, the Chair and the secretariat presented a draft strategic plan 2005-2015.<sup>3</sup> At the meeting it was agreed to provide the Conference with a strategic plan, in order to prepare a medium-term plan of action setting out strategic guidelines for the work of the Conference and focusing on five subject areas: institution-building measures for statistical offices and national statistical systems, training and human resources, statistical development (coverage and quality), modernization of management and the advancement of statistics. The Conference recognized that, in the coming decade, national statistical systems would face the following priority challenges: monitoring progress towards internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration; the 2005-2015 census round; and the 2008 update of the System of National Accounts. It also agreed, among other things, to promote a regional project to set a baseline for measuring progress towards the strategic goals; to identify stages for reaching these goals; to design projects for financing these endeavours; to define the modus operandi of the working groups; and to describe more fully the proposed subregional initiatives, taking North America into consideration. Also at that meeting working groups were formed on different statistical topics, whose task was to translate the priorities identified in the Strategic Plan 2005-2015 into lines of action and outputs and support their implementation.

## **B. EVALUATION METHOD AND RESULTS**

6. Evaluations of projects or programmes are usually based on existing goals and targets, which become the baseline for comparison. Although the initial version of the Strategic Plan and later updates had strategic and specific goals and lines of action for each specific goal, they did not define targets or timeframes for achieving these goals. This makes it difficult to evaluate the results and impact of the Strategic Plan using traditional assessment methods. While the initial version of the Strategic Plan did refer to the need for a baseline, this was not established, even though various themes were examined and projects outlined.

7. This evaluation exercise therefore examines the impact of the Strategic Plan as a medium- and long-term planning tool in achieving the fundamental goals of the Conference, by considering to what extent the Strategic Plan, designed to be a frame of reference and guide for the activities of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, has contributed to the achievement of its strategic goals.

8. In this context and bearing in mind the main goals of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, the impact of the Strategic Plan is evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- (a) Promoting countries' participation in the work of the regional statistical community and of the Statistical Conference of the Americas.
- (b) Coordinating the activities of international organizations operating in the region, based on countries' needs, as reflected in the priorities of the Statistical Conference of the Americas.
- (c) Prioritizing the targets and activities of regional statistical community stakeholders to strengthen national statistical systems and the leadership role of national statistical offices.

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<sup>3</sup> See ECLAC, *Report of the third meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC.L.2501) and *Strategic Plan 2005-2015* (LC/L.2751/Rev.1).

9. The methodology used combines three sources of information:
- (a) Opinions of relevant stakeholders from the regional statistical community.
  - (b) Opinions of the working groups' focal points.
  - (c) Qualitative reviews of agreements concluded at meetings of the Executive Committee and the Statistical Conference of the Americas.

### 1. Responses from relevant stakeholders from the regional statistical community

10. Nine people were asked to respond to the following questions concerning the main achievements of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, particularly in the light of the mission and vision set out in the Strategic Plan.<sup>4</sup> The questions asked and the responses received are set out below.

*Question 1. The Strategic Plan 2005-2015 was designed as a tool for prioritizing the goals and activities of the Statistical Conference of the Americas and, as such, should provide the frame of reference for the biennial programmes of regional and international cooperation, in order to facilitate the effective accomplishment of the four strategic goals of the Plan. In your opinion, to what extent has the Strategic Plan helped to achieve this?*

Question 1	Number
(a) To a large extent	2
(b) To a significant extent	1
(c) To some extent	1
(d) To a small extent	0
(e) To no extent	0

*Question 2. The Strategic Plan 2005-2015 was presented as a tool that would effectively consolidate the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC as the most significant stakeholder and supporter of regional and international cooperation and coordination, in order to make sure that the priorities identified by the countries are met. In your opinion, to what extent has the Strategic Plan helped to achieve this?*

Question 2	Number
(a) To a large extent	1
(b) To a significant extent	3
(c) To some extent	0
(d) To a small extent	0
(e) To no extent	0

<sup>4</sup> See the mission, vision and strategic goals of the Strategic Plan of Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, 2005-2015, in Annex 1 of this document.

*Question 3. The Strategic Plan 2005-2015 was developed as a tool to promote the active participation of countries in the discussions, decisions and activities of the Statistical Conference of the Americas. In your opinion, to what extent has the Strategic Plan helped to achieve this?*

Question 3	Number
(a) To a large extent	1
(b) To a significant extent	3
(c) To some extent	0
(d) To a small extent	0
(e) To no extent	0

11. In addition to selecting one of the given responses, respondents provided comments on those three questions, which are incorporated into the conclusions below.

## **2. Responses from the working groups' focal points**

12. Since the Strategic Plan identifies the working groups as the cornerstones of the implementation of the Plan, the focal points of the different working groups were asked about:

- (a) The working groups' role as entities that promote effective and wide participation of countries in matters of common interest.
- (b) The degree of alignment between the working groups' programmes of work and the goals and lines of action of the Strategic Plan.

*Question 1. The working groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas were conceived of as participatory bodies of the Conference to ensure that the decisions and work of the Conference should emanate from the member countries, and with the aim of analysing elements of common interest and formulating proposals and recommended actions. In your opinion, to what extent has the Strategic Plan helped the working groups to achieve this?*

Question 1	Number
(a) To a large extent	13
(b) To a significant extent	23
(c) To some extent	12
(d) To a small extent	2
(e) To no extent	2

*Question 2. In the light of the programme of work of the working group for which you are the focal point, in your opinion, to what extent are the goals and activities of the group aligned with the specific goals and lines of action of the Strategic Plan?*

Question 2	Number
(a) To a large extent	22
(b) To a significant extent	13
(c) To some extent	12
(d) To a small extent	0
(e) To no extent	2

### **3. Preliminary conclusions based on these responses**

13. Below, by way of preliminary conclusions, are the responses of focal points and relevant stakeholders from the regional statistical community.

14. The Strategic Plan is considered to have been useful as a tool for prioritizing the goals and activities of the Statistical Conference of the Americas and, as such, as the frame of reference for the biennial programmes of regional and international cooperation. It was pointed out that successive biennial programmes were designed to address the main goals of the Strategic Plan. These efforts were sustained over time and contributed to the steady progress towards achieving the long-term goals set out in the Strategic Plan. In this connection, one respondent observed that past experience indicated that stakeholders should seek to produce an adaptable, concise and realistic Strategic Plan, focused on the Sustainable Development Goals, and subject to possible amendments, if necessary, in order to adapt it to changing realities.

15. The Strategic Plan is considered to have had a positive impact as a tool that effectively consolidated the Statistical Conference of the Americas as the most significant stakeholder and supporter of regional and international cooperation and coordination. Comments highlighted its role as a roadmap or guide, which increased the Conference's usefulness and effectiveness in achieving the designated goals and as a global framework for regional cooperation and coordination priorities, and for the biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities. In this respect, one respondent noted that in the light of the last ten years of experience, it was no exaggeration to say that many of the Conference's achievements to date could be attributed to the existence of this roadmap. The Plan's usefulness and effectiveness had enabled it to rise to the challenge of its goals, thus positioning it as an institutional space that was highly valued by the countries themselves.

16. Similarly, the Strategic Plan was considered to have had a positive impact as a tool to promote the active participation of countries in the discussions, decisions and activities of the Statistical Conference of the Americas. Two comments were very clear on this point:

- The creation of the Working Group on Institution-building and its work had contributed significantly to the development of strategic goals 1 and 4.
- These bodies had largely been consolidated through the development and implementation of joint projects. The activities carried out by the Working Group on Institution-building in collaboration with the vast majority of countries, both in Latin America and the Caribbean, had highlighted the important role the Statistical Conference of the Americas played in promoting regional coordination.

17. The effective achievement of the goals of the Strategic Plan was closely linked to the initiative shown by countries and all relevant stakeholders and the amount of support they provided. One respondent said that the Strategic Plan 2005-2015 had served as a guide for implementing the goals. However, over the ten years, there had been weaknesses and shortcomings when it came to carrying out tasks and achieving targets, related to the need for effective support from the Executive Committee and the working groups, starting with the groups' internal coordination and the central role played ECLAC, as the secretariat of the Conference.

**(a) Alignment of the working groups with the priorities identified in the Strategic Plan**

18. Most of the working groups' focal points were of the view that the Strategic Plan had helped the working groups to achieve their aims. However, it should be noted that a significant number of respondents felt that the Strategic Plan had only contributed to some or to a small extent to the achievement of their aims.

19. In this connection, a possible hypothesis is that, while the Strategic Plan has been an effective tool for consolidating the Statistical Conference of the Americas as the most significant regional stakeholder, sufficient and effective resources were not secured to implement the Plan and to carry out the different activities.

20. When considering the programme of work of each working group, the vast majority of focal points were of the opinion that the goals and activities of their group was aligned to a large or to a significant extent with the specific goals and lines of action of the Strategic Plan. It is very likely that this assessment reflects the efforts undertaken for many years by the Executive Committee to ensure that the working groups were better able to prioritize and comply with their goals and to define more realistic and achievable targets. See in this connection the document presented and approved at the twelfth meeting of the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in April 2013.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4. Review of agreements**

21. It is not the aim of this report to examine in detail the Conference documents on the role of the Strategic Plan; it does however highlight some developments that had a significant impact on achieving the goals of the Strategic Plan.

22. Recognition of the role of the Statistical Conference of the Americas as the most significant official statistical forum in the region is evidenced in the number of countries and international organizations that participate in meetings held by the Statistical Conference of the Americas, and by the fact that the Conference is increasingly acting as the voice for the region in international forums, particularly the United Nations Statistical Commission. However, there is also a clear need to include other stakeholders from the regional statistical community, in addition to the national statistical offices, in the discussions and work of the Conference.

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<sup>5</sup> See ECLAC, *Progress report on the working groups and recommendations for improving their operation* (LC/L.3612(CE.12/3))



23. The agreements highlight the role of the Strategic Plan and the biennial programmes as means of prioritizing regional statistical work and of promoting regional cooperation with international organizations. However, the Strategic Plan still falls short as a tool for prioritizing the formulation of the programme of work of the international organizations.

24. On several occasions the Strategic Plan and the Statistical Conference of the Americas have raised emerging or priority issues on the regional and international statistical agenda, especially with regard to gender and environmental matters and new information and communications technologies. In particular, the substantive seminars held on the sidelines of the meetings of the Executive Committee and the Statistical Conference of the Americas have contributed to and promoted discussion of emerging issues on the regional agenda, various methodological issues, and the use of modern technology in the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics. However, the agreements failed to exploit the full potential of the Strategic Plan to set regional priorities and lines of action, to influence discussions within the international statistical community, and to align the regional programmes of work of various international institutions and organizations that operate in Latin America and the Caribbean.

25. The agreements highlight the role of the Strategic Plan as the framework for setting priorities for the development of official statistics that have also allowed some funding agencies to prioritize their support for regional projects, in particular, the Regional Public Goods Projects of the Inter-American Development Bank, the backing of the World Bank for various working groups and activities of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, and the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), particularly on population census matters. However, despite the considerable amount of funding raised to help achieve the goals of the Strategic Plan, too few priority regional projects, which form the basis for mobilizing resources to achieve those goals, were developed.

26. The development and adoption of the Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the completion of the first phase of the peer assessment process in eight countries on compliance with the Code, are very significant and regionally important steps towards attaining the goal of strengthening national statistical offices and national statistical systems. This achievement is also significant from the point of view of the working group's good operational practices, in accordance with the guidelines agreed by the Conference to optimize the contribution of working groups to achieving the goals of the Strategic Plan.

### **C. SOME RECOMMENDATIONS**

27. Below are some lessons learned from the conclusions outlined above and the discussions held and agreements adopted at the various meetings of the Executive Committee and the Conference.

28. As was stated in the first document to call for the development of a Strategic Plan for the Statistical Conference of the Americas, the Strategic Plan must be accompanied by a plan of activities that describes, in as much detail as possible, the initial baseline situation and sets out the targets and deadlines for each of the goals to be achieved over the period covered by the Strategic Plan. This will provide a better guide for the work led by the Conference and the Executive Committee in particular, and, allow countries and international organizations to make more concrete and realistic commitments with regard to their contribution to achieving these goals.

29. While the focal points' responses indicate that the working groups' programmes are fairly well aligned with the goals of the Strategic Plan, the discussions held and agreements adopted at recent meetings point to a need to ensure better compliance with and selection of priorities for the groups' programmes of work. It is therefore recommended that the groups' programmes of work should be developed in accordance with the Strategic Plan goals and with strictly defined targets and deadlines to be met, in line with the preceding paragraph.

30. In that connection, progress in achieving the goals and targets of the Strategic Plan must be monitored more closely and more often. Evaluations of the results of biennial programmes could be an opportune moment to review progress on the targets of the Strategic Plan. In addition, a thorough review of the Strategic Plan should be carried out every four years (two bienniums), and the goals and targets amended or revised accordingly.

31. While there is widespread and growing appreciation among international organizations operating at both the regional and international level for the coordination provided by the Statistical Conference of the Americas in statistical work in Latin America and the Caribbean, it would be very beneficial to disseminate the new Strategic Plan more widely in order to generate more opportunities for cooperation with those organizations. It would also be useful to raise the visibility of the Strategic Plan and its development through various media, with particular emphasis on the Knowledge Transfer Network and the website of the Statistical Conference of the Americas.

## Annex

**MISSION, VISION AND STRATEGIC GOALS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE  
STATISTICAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS OF ECLAC, 2005-2015****1. Mission**

The mission of the Statistical Conference of the Americas is to be the intergovernmental body that coordinates the promotion of the development of the official statistics of Latin American and Caribbean countries, encourages the strengthening of national statistical offices and national statistical systems, contributes to the improvement of technical quality through human resources training and the statistical development of each country, and promotes international, regional and bilateral coordination and cooperation and the harmonization of statistics at the regional and subregional levels.

**2. Vision for 2015**

The Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC will consolidate its position as the most significant stakeholder and supporter of regional and international cooperation and coordination in order to make sure that they meet the priorities identified by the countries.

Thanks to the work of the Conference, in 2015 the region will be recognized for significantly enhancing national statistical systems, particular in terms of narrowing gaps in performance between countries of the region. The improvement will be based on well-qualified human resources, increased compliance with the highest international standards and greater quality, efficiency and public credibility of its statistics.

The working groups of the Conference, which are composed of experts from the countries and have the technical and financial support of international bodies, will be the main channel through which the Strategic Plan of the Conference is carried out.

All governments in the region will be well informed about the importance of statistics in the design and assessment of public policies, which will result in a stable and increasing flow of financing for the functioning of national statistical systems and statistical offices. The national statistical offices will thus have access to common assets in terms of knowledge, methodology and technological developments, which will enable them to respond to the requirements of their authorities in a timely manner.

**3. Strategic goals**

- Goal 1: To strengthen the strategic and operational management practices and organization of the national statistical offices and national statistical systems in order to ensure the quality of their outputs and the satisfaction of users.
- Goal 2: To promote the training of staff in producing high-quality statistical information, managing national statistical systems and carrying out research into statistical methodology.
- Goal 3: To promote the development of technical and methodological capacities in order to generate high-quality statistical information in the region.
- Goal 4: To promote coordination and cooperation between the member countries of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC and international agencies.