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**REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE MONITORING  
OF PROGRESS TOWARDS THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS\***

\* This report was prepared by the secretariat.

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## 1. Objectives and scope of work

The objectives of the Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals are as follows:

- To support and promote the active participation of national statistical offices in the preparation and dissemination of national reports on the Millennium Development Goals in each country.
- To analyse discrepancies between the data produced by the countries and those used by international bodies in monitoring the Goals, and to develop an agenda of measures to facilitate inter-agency coordination and harmonization of national statistics at the domestic level as well as with statistics produced by international bodies.
- To broaden and improve sources of statistical data and the methodological bases used in the preparation of indicators for monitoring progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>1</sup>

At its seventh meeting, the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) decided to revise the programme of work of this group in order to focus its activities initially on the second Millennium Development Goal. Accordingly, the project for updating the poverty measurement methodology used in Latin America and the Caribbean, which originally fell within the group's mandate, will be conducted by a different body.

## 2. Progress thus far

ECLAC has carried out a number of activities aimed at strengthening the statistical and institutional capacities of official statistical agencies and other sectoral bodies, in order to improve the monitoring and follow-up of progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. These activities have been undertaken jointly with the countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region, although the coordination between ECLAC and the group's coordinator has not occurred as would have been desirable at this stage.

The international community and the countries in the region in particular have been concerned that the values of the indicators of the Millennium Development Goals published by countries in their national reports show discrepancies compared with those published by international bodies. In recent years, ECLAC has sought to identify the root causes of these statistical discrepancies and of the information gaps that still exist in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

A broad evaluation has been conducted of the differences in data availability and the discrepancies between the values reported by national and international sources. Several documents have resulted from this process. In 2007 and 2008 ECLAC produced two documents which contain a detailed description of the problem of statistical discrepancies and deficiencies, consider the apparent causes and

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<sup>1</sup> Objective reworded in accordance with a decision taken at the seventh meeting of the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC.

put forward possible courses of action for solving both problems.<sup>2</sup> In 2008 a third document was prepared compiling the experiences of some of the region's countries and certain international agencies regarding practices employed in producing indicators for the Millennium Development Goals, in terms of both methodology and inter-agency coordination.<sup>3</sup> The countries of the region were actively involved in preparing this document. Lastly, in 2009 the assessment of the discrepancies was updated and the findings of the previous documents were compiled and consolidated in a fourth document, which also sets forth a regional statistical reconciliation strategy for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals in the Latin American and Caribbean countries.<sup>4</sup>

To date, two regional seminars on the Millennium Development Goals have been organized together with the Latin American and Caribbean countries, bringing together the directors of the national statistical offices in the region, the national rapporteurs responsible for reporting on such progress and the representatives of international bodies, thereby creating a forum in which all the actors involved in preparing statistics relating to the Goals could exchange ideas. The first meeting, the regional seminar "Statistical and institutional challenges for monitoring progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean", was held in Bogota in November 2007. The second regional seminar, "Towards a regional strategy for statistical harmonization for monitoring progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean", was held in Santo Domingo in October 2008.

ECLAC is also working with the countries of the region to prepare a regional agenda of statistical reconciliation 2010-2015, whose aim is to set up common methodological guidelines for the production of statistics relating to the Millennium Development Goals, create institutional coordination forums in the different levels and provide support for technical capacity-building in order to ensure appropriate follow-up and monitoring of progress towards the Goals. A series of activities have been conducted in this regard in order to establish benchmarks and define best practices for statistical production in the region, in terms of methodology and inter-agency coordination at the national and international levels.

### 3. Current work

ECLAC is now working on a number of areas relating to statistical aspects of the Millennium Development Goals, including the following:

#### (a) Statistical harmonization relating to the Millennium Development Goals

- Work is under way to identify and account for the discrepancies in the priority indicators of the Millennium Development Goals, by agency and country, with a view to:

<sup>2</sup> Simone Cecchini and Irene Azócar, "Indicadores de los objetivos de desarrollo del Milenio en América Latina y el Caribe: una comparación entre datos nacionales e internacionales", *Estudios estadísticos y prospectivos series*, No. 53 (LC/L.2767-P), Santiago, Chile, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). United Nations publication, Sales No. S.07.II.G.103.

<sup>3</sup> Rayén Quiroga and Irene Azócar, "Calculando indicadores de los objetivos de desarrollo del Milenio en países de América Latina y el Caribe: vacíos de información y discrepancias estadísticas entre fuentes nacionales e internacionales", 2008, unpublished.

<sup>4</sup> Irene Azócar, Rayén Quiroga and Pauline Stockins, "Vacíos y discrepancias estadísticas en los indicadores ODM: hacia una estrategia regional de conciliación estadística para el monitoreo de los objetivos de desarrollo del Milenio en los países de América Latina y el Caribe", in press, 2009.

- exploring specific causes of discrepancies between the values reported for the indicators;
  - identifying the indicators on which data (from national and international sources) can be reconciled;
  - preparing recommendations for moving towards statistical reconciliation by subject area.
- A regional seminar on the Millennium Development Goals is being organized in October 2009 in order to follow up on the Bogota and Santo Domingo meetings. The purpose of the seminar is to consolidate the network of information from national statistical and sectoral bodies and the regional agencies, in order to properly monitor progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and carry forward the strategy of statistical reconciliation between national and international sources.
  - The complementary indicators reported by the Latin American and Caribbean countries in their national reports on the Millennium Development Goals are being compiled and analysed. This will make it possible to reassess the additional indicators that have been proposed for the region in relation to the various issues encompassed by the Goals and explore the availability of statistics to prepare those indicators.
  - A search is being undertaken for local (subnational) initiatives relating to the Millennium Development Goals in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Thus far, the work has identified reports on progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals at the local level, as well as documents on local best practices or assessments of the costs involved in achieving the Goals. Initiatives of this sort have been identified in Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

**(b) Dissemination of statistical work relating to the Millennium Development Goals among the countries of the region**

- The format and content of the ECLAC Millennium Development Goals website have been changed. The website is now bilingual (English and Spanish) and is updated regularly in order to provide a platform that offers the countries access to statistical documentation, national reports on the Millennium Development Goals and resources prepared for the seminars and workshops organized in the framework of the statistical programme relating to the Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean. In particular, the website offers updated information, documents and studies on gaps and discrepancies in the information on the Millennium Development Goals and summarizes and links the activities conducted by ECLAC and other agencies with respect to the Goals.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4. Objectives for 2009-2011**

In this period, the Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals intends to redouble its efforts to build and improve statistical capacities for the production of indicators for the Millennium Development Goals and deepen coordination between agencies at the

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<sup>5</sup> See Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Millennium Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean" [online] <http://www.cepal.org/mdg/default.asp?idioma=IN>.

national level and between the countries and the international agencies in order to carry forward the regional agenda of statistical reconciliation for the Goals.

To this end, the working group invites the Conference to consider and approve the following specific objectives and activities for 2009-2011.

1. Improve coordination between ECLAC and the coordinator of the Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, with a view to strengthening the role of national statistical offices in implementing the programme of work for the new biennium.
2. Contribute to building up national coordination mechanisms for the production of statistics for the Millennium Development Goals and for proper reporting on the Goals in national reports. This will be carried out with the collaboration of statistical offices, the rapporteurs responsible for national reports and the corresponding sector ministers.
3. Analyse and propose indicators that will enable the Latin American and Caribbean countries to evaluate progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals at the subnational level in line with the priorities and conditions established in each country.
4. Promote the development and implementation of the regional statistical reconciliation strategy for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals in order to facilitate inter-agency coordination and the harmonization of statistics within the countries and among the countries and the international agencies.
5. Identify and channel financial resources to contribute to further building and improvement of the countries' statistical capacities to produce indicators showing progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and to promote their use in the corresponding reports and by other users.
6. Promote and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences regarding the production and use of statistics for the Millennium Development Goals among the countries of the region, based on the inter-agency network of producers and users of indicators for the Millennium Development Goals in the region.
7. Urge international agencies to improve the coverage and transparency of methodologies employed to calculate the values of indicators for the Millennium Development Goals and to avoid the use of imputed figures unless consultations with the respective countries have yielded specific national data to support them reliably.

## **5. Planned activities for 2009-2011**

In order to fulfil the objectives indicated, the working group envisages the following activities:

- (a) General activities
  - (i) Regular meetings of the working group:
    - Face-to-face meeting to assess the activities carried out in the previous biennium and adjust the activities and timeline proposed for 2009-2011.
    - Remote meetings to coordinate the activities defined for the new biennium.
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- (b) Activities relating to objective 1 (statistical development)
  - (i) Promote the active participation of national statistical offices in the preparation and dissemination of national reports on the Millennium Development Goals.
    - Organize technical meetings between national statistical offices and the producers of national reports on the Millennium Development Goals.
    - Promote the formation and operation of national inter-agency coordination groups or committees on the Millennium Development Goals, involving producers (national statistical offices and sector ministries) and users of statistics on the Millennium Development Goals (rapporteurs responsible for preparing national reports).
  - (ii) Organize specific inter-agency working groups on the Millennium Development Goals by subject (poverty, gender, health, education, environment, and so forth) in the countries.
    - Select the priority issues of the Millennium Development Goals.
    - Set up thematic coordination bodies.
    - Prepare the programme of work for these bodies.
  - (iii) Request the regional agencies to provide technical cooperation and training (subject to availability of funds) on general and specific statistical matters relating to the Millennium Development Goals, in order to build up the technical capacities of the countries of the region.
- (c) Activities relating to objectives 2 (reconciliation) and 4 (regional network)
  - (i) Carry out at least one annual seminar on the Millennium Development Goals, bringing together the directors of the national statistical offices in the region, the national rapporteurs responsible for reporting on the Goals and the representatives of international bodies, in order to create a forum in which all the actors involved in preparing statistics relating to the Goals can exchange ideas.
  - (ii) Discuss the regional agenda on statistical harmonization in specialized regional and subregional statistical forums (poverty, health, environment, education, gender, and so forth).
- (d) Activities relating to objective 3 (financing)
  - (i) Remote coordination by the countries to formulate fund-raising strategies and to prepare projects to finance activities relating to statistical aspects of the Millennium Development Goals.
  - (ii) Identify possible sources of resources and donors.
  - (iii) Manage projects with donors.

- (e) Activities relating to objective 5 (discrepancies between national and international sources)
- (i) Request international and regional agencies to provide information on the measures that have been adopted to improve the coverage and transparency of information on indicators for the Millennium Development Goals and the imputation methods used.
- Formally request the information from international and regional agencies.
  - Present the information to the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC for information and analysis.