

ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL

CONSEIL
ECONOMIQUE
ET SOCIAL

E/CN.3/SR.38
26 April 1949

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION

FOURTH SESSION

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE THIRTY-EIGHTH MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 26 April 1949, at 11 a.m.

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SAMPLING ON ITS SECOND SESSION (Item 4 of
the Agenda)

N.B. Will delegates who wish to have corrections made to the
Summary Record please submit such corrections in
writing on the official notepaper of their delegation
to the Secretariat, Room C452, as soon as possible after
distribution of the Summary Record.

Present:

<u>Chairman:</u>	Mr. IDENBURG	Netherlands
<u>Rapporteur:</u>	Mr. CAMPION	United Kingdom
<u>Members:</u>	Mr. MARSHALL	Canada
	Mr. DARMOIS	France
	Mr. MAHALANOBIS	India
	Mr. JAHN	Norway
	Mr. RYABICHKO (Vice-Chairman)	Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic
	Mr. RYABUSHKIN	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
	Mr. RICE	United States of America

Representatives of Specialised Agencies:

Mr. WOODBURY	International Labour Organisation
Mr. TOLLEY	(Food and Agriculture Organisation
Mr. CHOMBART de LAUWE	(Organisation
Mr. HOFMAN	United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation
Mr. GRAB representing Mr. PASCUA	World Health Organisation
Miss JETER	International Refugee Organisation

Representative of Non-Governmental Organisation:

Mr. GOUDSWAARD	International Statistical Institute
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Secretariat:

Mr. LEONARD	Representing the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs
Mr. BRUCE	Secretary to the Commission
Mr. LOFTUS	Statistical Office

REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION ON STATISTICAL SAMPLING ON ITS SECOND SESSION (Item 4 of the Agenda) (Documents E/CN.3/52 and E/CN.3/52/Add.1)

The CHAIRMAN requested Mr. Mahalanobis, Chairman of the Sub-Commission on Statistical Sampling, to present the Sub-Commission's Report. (Document E/CN.3/52) chapter by chapter.

Chapter I : Agenda

There was no discussion on Chapter I.

Chapter II : Functions and Aims of the Sub-Commission on Statistical Sampling

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) drew attention to paragraphs 8, 10 and 11 of Chapter II, which dealt with the Sub-Commission's methods of procedure and its recommendations concerning future methods of work.

Mr. RYABUSHKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) stated that, with the assistance of the interpreters, he had examined certain sections of the report, the complete text of which was not available in Russian. He would, therefore, only be able to comment on those paragraphs which he had studied, which were, according to the Secretariat, the most important. If, however, the Commission intended to discuss the document as a whole, it would, in his opinion, be best for a provisional oral translation of the whole document to be made.

Chapter III : Sample Surveys of Current Interest and Exchange of Information

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) emphasized the importance of the Sub-Commission's recommendations in sub-paragraphs a) to d) inclusive of paragraph 15.

In paragraph 16 the Sub-Commission had recommended that additional efforts should be made to collect information on surveys conducted by non-governmental organisations. That was a point of considerable significance.

Mr. MARSHALL (Canada) asked whether the Secretariat intended to produce a more detailed report on the most important surveys carried out, using the proposed standard terminology suggested in the Appendix (Document E/CN.3/52/Add.1). In his opinion, it would be of singular value were the Sub-Commission to evaluate the surveys critically, so that both the Statistical Commission and individual countries might benefit by its views.

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) drew the attention of the Canadian representative to sub-paragraphs c) and d) of paragraph 15, where it was stated that reports on sample surveys would be prepared and circulated from time to time by the Secretariat.

Mr. MARSHALL (Canada) assumed that the sub-paragraph referred to by the representative of India was intended to provide for the critical analysis he had in mind.

Mr. DARMOIS (France), referring to sub-paragraph b) of paragraph 15, asked how far the Secretariat had already been able to establish and develop contacts with correspondents.

Mr. LEONARD, representing the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs, said that contacts had not yet been developed to the extent that the Secretariat had hoped for.

Mr. RYABUSHKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked what exactly was meant by the term "correspondents". Could the Secretariat further elucidate the whole question?

Mr. LEONARD, representing the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs, stated that the Secretariat had established contact with the central statistical offices in the various countries, and requested them to provide information on the sample surveys they undertook.

Mr. RYABUSHKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that if the Secretariat was in contact with national statistical offices, the term "correspondent" was inapplicable.

Mr. LEONARD, representing the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs, added that, in certain instances the Secretariat had followed up its initial enquiry with a request for further information, which in several cases had proved very productive.

Chapter IV: Standardization of Technical Terminology and Points to be Covered in Reports on Sample Surveys.

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) pointed out that the standard terminology given in the appendix (Document E/CN.3/52/Ad.1) should not be considered final; the Sub-Commission intended at its next session to consider methods of improving it.

Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom), Rapporteur, said that Mr. Yates, a member of the Sub-Commission, had compiled a manual in English of sampling methods, in which he had used a number of terms the general application of which the Sub-Commission wished to ensure. It was a remarkable work, which would shortly be published, and of which he had in his possession an advance copy which members might consult.

Mr. MARSHALL (Canada) said that it had been his impression that the manual was to have been compiled under the auspices of the Sub-Commission on Statistical Sampling, and issued in all the official languages by the Statistical Commission. Had appropriate arrangements been made?

Mr. LEONARD, representing the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs, replied that no definite

arrangements for publication had been made in the first place.

The position now was that the Secretariat did not intend to publish the manual in English, but that discussions were taking place in respect of a French edition.

Mr. DARMOIS (France) agreed with the United Kingdom representative as to the importance of the manual, and regretted that it would be distributed on purely commercial lines.

Mr. CHOMBART DE LAUWE (Food and Agriculture Organization) stated that the Food and Agriculture Organization was extremely grateful to Mr. Yates for having undertaken a work, the need for which was so greatly felt. Even if it were impossible to conclude arrangements for publication with the United Nations, the widest possible distribution should be secured for the manual. The Food and Agriculture Organization intended to draw the attention of all its correspondents to it, since it would provide an invaluable tool in the agricultural censuses of 1950 and 1951.

Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom) pointed out that, although in the Sub-Commission's Report reference to Mr. Yates' manual was made only in Chapter VII in connection with the world census of agriculture, its scope was by no means limited to agriculture. Recognizing its value, the United Kingdom authorities proposed to distribute copies of the manual to agricultural specialists in the colonies.

Chapter V: Consideration of Sampling Methods in Family Budget Enquiries.

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) said that the Sub-Commission had endeavoured to suggest a concrete programme for the sampling of family budgets. Its proposals were set out in Paragraph 31. As

stated in Paragraph 44 it was the Sub-Commission's considered opinion that small-scale successive surveys taken more frequently afforded better opportunities of control and yielded fuller information on trends, than did large-scale, but infrequent surveys.

Mr. RICE (United States of America) expressed his appreciation of the significant proposals made by the Sub-Commission in Chapter V and asked what methods were contemplated for drawing the attention of governments to their practical application.

Mr. WOODBURY (International Labour Organization) also expressed his appreciation of the Sub-Commission's work, which would contribute considerably to the development of family budget studies. That problem figured on the agenda of the Seventh Conference of International Labour Statisticians, scheduled to be held in October 1949, and the International Labour Organization therefore intended to reproduce in its report to the Conference that chapter of the Sub-Commission's Report. Thus the departments in the various countries dealing with labour questions would be able to take cognisance of the Sub-Commission's recommendations.

Mr. DARMOIS (France) stated that family budget studies would shortly be carried out in France.

Mr. JAHN (Norway) wished to emphasize the fact that Chapter V was very well balanced and clearly brought out the Sub-Commission's awareness of the difficulty of taking a true sample. He must warmly congratulate the Sub-Commission on its work.

Mr. MARSHALL (Canada) hoped that the knowledge that the Canadian authorities intended to incorporate its recommendations in their current programme of budgetary surveys would encourage the Sub-Commission to continue its efforts.

Chapter VI: Application of Sampling Methods in National Income Statistics and related Aggregates

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) stated that Chapter VI constituted a preliminary approach to the problem, on which very little practical work had been done. Further information was required, especially in view of the fact that sampling methods in national income statistics would be valuable in considering the problems of the under-developed countries. Paragraph 47 indicated three general methods of preparing national income estimates. In the opinion of the Sub-Commission, it was desirable, in view of the difficulty of checking the figures, that those three different methods of approaching the problem should be kept in mind.

Mr. JAHN (Norway) stated that the problem of national income statistics was extremely important, since many countries used such statistics in computing their national budgets. The relevant figures, however, were frequently unreliable, and even in the most advanced countries only part of the national income could be accurately estimated. The application of sampling methods to national income statistics should yield fruitful results, and it was therefore important that those methods should be improved.

Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom) feared that some of the statements made in Chapter VI erred on the side of optimism. Paragraph 49, for instance, contained a reference to the estimates of profits of individual firms. It was, however, very difficult to define either "profits" or "firms". Further, in the matter of national budgets, even a 1% error might invalidate the whole estimate.

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) said that the Sub-Commission was well aware of the difficulties to which attention had been drawn by the representatives of Norway and the United Kingdom. It would be useful to make a direct approach to the kind of problems that the latter had mentioned.

Chapter VII: 1950 World Census of Agriculture

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) outlined the main points in Chapter VII.

Mr. CHOMBART de LAUWE (Food and Agriculture Organization) said that the Food and Agriculture Organization was very grateful for the work the Sub-Commission had carried out on the 1950 World Census of Agriculture. He hoped that it would study further the problem of statistics of yield per acre. The Food and Agriculture Organization had not yet completed the study of the methods used in preparing estimates of the acreage and production of rice, but when it had done so it would supply the Sub-Commission with all relevant documentation.

Chapter VIII: Manpower Statistics.

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) said that Chapter VIII was a continuation of the section on manpower statistics in the Report of the first session of the Sub-Commission. The main point in Chapter VIII was that the value of a "bench-mark" as a point of reference for manpower statistics might prove limited, and that methods relying on small successive sample surveys were often best.

Mr. RYABUSHKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that Chapter VIII, like other chapters to a certain extent, was based on the assumption that there were no errors in sample surveys, but the Commission should not forget that it would not be possible to eliminate all errors in sample surveys, particularly in respect of social factors. Every effort should be made to avoid errors which might invalidate the surveys.

Mr. WOODBURY (International Labour Organization) said that the International Labour Organization was grateful to the Sub-Commission for its work on manpower statistics; however, the problems which the latter had tackled in that connection were far from precise. It was true that information for establishing a "bench-mark" could be obtained by taking a census, but what was most needed was a series of figures covering different periods, and sampling provided the most appropriate means of obtaining such figures. However, it was not at present possible to obtain satisfactory information on manpower in all countries in the same way. The International Labour Office would be grateful if it could refer to the Sub-Commission any special sampling problems which might be raised at Organization meetings by individual governments.

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) replied that it was pointed out in paragraph 58 that "suitability of methods of data collection was dependent on the conditions peculiar to a country". It would not be appropriate to draw up a standard plan for adoption by all countries.

Chapter IX: 1950 Censuses of Population

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) pointed out that the 1950 Censuses of Population had been dealt with at much greater length in the report of the first session of the Sub-Commission. The Sub-Commission's recommendations had since been endorsed by the Population Commission: their application would reveal how sound they were.

Chapter X: Programme for the Education and Training
of Statisticians.

On the proposal of the CHAIRMAN,

the Commission agreed to defer examination of Chapter X: Programme for the Education and Training of Statisticians, until it came to discuss Item 6(a) of its Agenda (Report of the Secretary-General on Education and Training in Statistics).

Chapter XI: Programme of Future Work of the Sub-Commission.

Mr. MAHALANOBIS (India) drew attention to the main points of Chapter XI.

Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom) believed that the Sub-Commission had done its best to study in detail several extensive problems, but it was a very small body; and he doubted whether it would be able to achieve anything really useful by studying the vast general question of "statistics for planning in economic development programmes" (sub-paragraph 72 c)). The Sub-Commission ought not to give priority to the study of "statistical quality control" (sub-paragraph 72 d)); that question had already been under consideration by other bodies for about fifteen years.

Did the Sub-Commission intend to give further consideration to problems which it had already studied and to examine the results of the application of its recommendations, or did it intend to study new problems? Further, did the Sub-Commission consider that sampling problems generally should be referred to it, and that it should give advice on them, or did it feel that it should confine its attention to a small number of specific items?

Mr. RYABUSHKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said

that some of the items mentioned in Chapter XI were important and practical, for example, the development of standard terminology in sampling; but those mentioned in sub-paragraphs 72 b) c) and d) were less important and of a somewhat theoretical and long-term nature; the Sub-Commission should not turn to their study until it had dealt with the practical problems confronting it.

Mr. JAHN (Norway) said that the study of statistics for planning in economic development programmes (sub-paragraph 72 c)) formed a vast general problem, only part of which was concerned with sampling proper.

Procedure.

Mr. CAMPION (United Kingdom), Rapporteur, said that he intended to consult Mr. Mahalanobis (India), Chairman of the Sub-Commission, before submitting a draft of that section of the Commission's report dealing with the report of the Sub-Commission. But, although the Commission had not yet finished examining the Sub-Commission's report, representatives might like to consider before the next meeting whether they would approve a draft resolution containing:

- (a) a statement that the Commission noted with approval the Sub-Commission's report;
- (b) a recommendation that the Secretary-General take steps towards promoting the more widespread use of scientific sampling methods by governments and international bodies, and a recommendation that the Sub-Commission's suggestions should be brought to the notice of governments and international statistical bodies; and
- (c) a sentence relating to the question of providing technical advice on statistical sampling to governments which might seek it.

The meeting rose at 1.5 p.m.