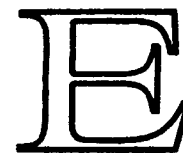




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Item 12 of the provisional agenda

STATISTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

Introduction

1. Social issues have constituted an important component of development efforts at the international, regional and country levels. In this context, the United Nations held four international meetings between 1994 and 1996, namely the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995), the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and, more recently, the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II, held in Istanbul, 1996).
2. In preparation for these meetings, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized a series of regional conferences leading to the adoption of the Amman Declaration on Population, the Arab Declaration on Social Development, the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005, and the Arab Declaration on the Sustainable Development of Human Settlements.
3. The United Nations conferences produced platforms of action reflecting the attention given to social matters at the international and regional levels, proposed numerous recommendations addressing the issues at hand, and emphasized the need for data in the formulation of development policies and the monitoring of progress made towards the desired goals.
4. The present paper constitutes a report of the work carried out by the Expert Group on the Statistical Implications of Recent Major United Nations Conferences. It includes the recommendations made by the Expert Group, as well as the minimum set of national social data the Group established for the purpose of assessing, measuring and monitoring the progress achieved in social development following these summit meetings. The paper also suggests a plan of work for the development of social statistics in accordance with the platforms of action produced by the United Nations summit meetings and conferences.

I. AREAS OF SOCIAL CONCERN

5. The Expert Group identified five broad areas of social concern based on the five policy themes of the action plans of the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, and the Fourth World Conference on Women. These are as follows:¹

Policy themes

A. Population and development

B. Eradication of poverty

C. Expansion of productive employment and reduction of unemployment

D. Social integration

E. Status of women and men

Major areas of social concern

- Health
- Material well-being
- Education

- Income and expenditure
- Economic resources

- Work
- Working environment
- Education and training

- Housing
- Work
- Crime and criminal justice

- Health
- Education
- Work
- Income

A. Population and development

6. At the International Conference on Population and Development, three major objectives were identified:

- (a) Infant, child and maternal mortality reduction;
- (b) The provision of universal access to reproductive health services, including family planning and sexual health;
- (c) Sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development; education, especially for girls and women; and gender equity and equality.²

7. In the context of establishing an effective mechanism for assessing the current situation at the country level with regard to the Conference objectives, the Programme of Action calls for strengthening national capabilities in the collection, analysis and publication of essential data and giving priority to gender statistics. It also calls for international and regional cooperation in supporting the efforts of countries, especially developing countries, to strengthen their national capabilities in the collection, dissemination, analysis and use of data relating to population and development.³ Further, the Programme of Action advocates the use of three sets of internationally accepted statistical indicators on mortality, reproductive health and basic education.

B. Eradication of poverty

8. Commitment 2 of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development reads as follows:

“We commit ourselves to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind.”⁴

9. As a means of accomplishing this goal, commitment 2 calls for the establishment of national standards and indicators on the scope and distribution of absolute poverty, preferably by the year 1996, the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty.⁵

10. There are many causes of poverty, including multidimensional structural elements with deep roots at the national and international levels. The concept of poverty differs according to the national standards and values of individual countries. Absolute poverty is a situation characterized by severe deprivation relative to basic human needs such as food, safe drinking water, sanitation, health, shelter and education. It is based not only on income but also on accessibility to general services. Relative poverty is measured on the basis of average per capita income according to the relative social status of an individual or family, so it varies from one country to another. United Nations bodies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), are making serious efforts to develop a poverty index similar to the human development index (HDI.)

11. To determine the number of people currently living in poverty, a set of indicators is used to classify people, or more specifically, to draw a line between the poor and others, according to a determined standard. (The annex to the present paper shows a number of indicators used in determining the poverty situation in the countries of the region.)

C. Expansion of productive employment and reduction of unemployment

12. Commitment 3 of the Copenhagen Declaration reads:

“We commit ourselves to promoting the goal of full employment as a basic priority of our economic and social policies, and to enabling all men and women to attain secure and sustainable livelihoods through freely chosen productive employment and work.”⁶

13. The Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development calls for strengthening labour market information systems, particularly through the development of appropriate data and indicators on employment, underemployment, unemployment and earnings, as well as through the dissemination of information concerning labour markets, including, to the extent possible, work situations outside formal markets. All of these data should be classified according to gender to allow for comparison of the status of women with that of men.

14. Paragraphs 206 (f) of strategic objective H.3 of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women calls for the development of a more comprehensive knowledge of all forms of work

and employment by “(i) Improving data collection on the unremunerated work which is already included in the United Nations System of National Accounts, such as in agriculture, particularly subsistence agriculture, and other types of non-market production activities; [and] (ii) Improving measurements that at present underestimate women’s unemployment and underemployment in the labour market.” Paragraph 206 (h) of strategic objective H.3 calls for the improvement of “concepts and methods of data collection on the measurement of poverty among women and men, including their access to resources.”⁷

15. At present, work statistics provide the required indicators for studying labour markets and for planning the expansion of productive employment and the reduction of unemployment. However, further development is still needed with regard to work, placement and salary statistics (see annex).

D. Social integration

16. Commitment 4 of the Copenhagen Declaration reads:

“We commit ourselves to promoting social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.”⁸

17. The Copenhagen Declaration clearly shows that the aim of social integration is to establish “a society for all” where each individual has rights and duties and an active role to play. Such a society must be based on respect for human rights and fundamental liberties, cultural and religious diversity, social justice, the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, democratic participation and the rule of law. In many instances, societal diversity has led to problems in achieving and maintaining harmony, cooperation and equal access to all resources of society.

18. In this regard, the Expert Group emphasized that there were no absolute standards of social integration nor any internationally recognized standards against which to measure the disadvantages suffered by particular groups. The Group therefore recommended that the countries themselves develop measurement methods to identify disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. However, such an endeavour would involve a number of practical problems, including those related to identifying and determining targeted groups as well as their coverage in traditional data collection instruments such as population censuses and household surveys (the sampling forms used might not include all of the groups, particularly those without fixed residences). The annex lists some of the indicators used in determining the level of social integration.

E. The status of women and men

19. Aiming to achieve equality between women and men, the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women calls on Governments, the international community and civil associations, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to concentrate on the strategic objectives in the following critical areas of concern:⁹

- The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women

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- Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training
- Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and related services
- Violence against women
- The effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women including those living under foreign occupation
- Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources
- Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels
- Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women
- Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women
- Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media
- Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment
- Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl-child¹⁰

1. The importance of gender statistics

20. The main objective of working in gender statistics is to ensure the collection, classification, analysis, dissemination and presentation of data according to age and gender in a way that reflects the issues of women and men in society.

21. In reality, gender statistics are very limited in some areas owing to conceptual and definition-related problems and to the difficulties associated with data collection and the lack of communication channels between the users and producers of statistics. In some instances, data collection is disregarded altogether, and in other cases it is carried out without classification according to gender. Once these statistics are available they can be used in the following areas:

- (a) To raise consciousness, persuade policy makers, and promote changes;
- (b) To stimulate ideas for change;
- (c) To provide an unbiased basis for policies and measures;
- (d) To monitor and evaluate policies and actions taken.¹¹

2. The Beijing Platform for Action and proposed statistical action

22. Strategic objective H.3 of the Beijing Platform for Action emphasizes the need to "generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation". It also urges "national, regional and international statistical services and relevant governmental and United Nations agencies, in cooperation with research and documentation organizations, in their respective areas of responsibility," to do the following:

(a) Ensure that statistics related to individuals are collected, compiled, analysed and presented by sex and age and reflect problems, issues and questions related to women and men in society;

(b) Collect, compile, analyse and present on a regular basis data disaggregated by age, sex, socio-economic and other relevant indicators, including number of dependants, for utilization in policy and programme planning and implementation.

3. Gender inequality measurement

23. In the Human Development Report 1995, the UNDP proposes two compound indices to measure gender disparities:

(a) The gender-related development index (GDI)

The gender-related development index (GDI) measures achievement in the same basic capabilities as the HDI does, but takes note of inequality in achievement between women and men. The methodology used imposes a penalty for inequality, such that the GDI falls when the achievement levels of both women and men in a country go down or when the disparity between their achievements increases. The greater the gender disparity in basic capabilities, the lower a country's GDI compared with its HDI. The GDI is simply the HDI discounted, or adjusted downwards, for gender inequality.¹²

(b) The gender empowerment measure (GEM)

The gender empowerment measure (GEM) focuses on the economic, political and professional participation of both men and women. It seeks to determine the extent of the empowerment of women or their exclusion from participation in various aspects of public life in comparison with men. Unfortunately, owing to the limited amount of available data, the GEM does not detect many dimensions of empowerment, especially within households or in local communities or rural areas. It concentrates on only three variables: the capability to earn income, the share of professional and administrative activities, and the share of seats in parliament.¹³

II. STATISTICAL RESPONSE TO THE FIVE POLICY THEMES OF THE MAJOR UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCES

24. The statistical response to the five policy themes was reflected in the Expert Group's request from the Member States to establish the minimum national social data set (MNSDS) needed for directing

development policies and decision-making. The suggested composition of the MNSDS is based on the following:

- (a) Direct relevance to the summits' policy themes;
- (b) Accepted international definitions and classifications;
- (c) The need for a collection instrument that is feasible in most countries;
- (d) The feasibility of gender disaggregation.

25. The minimum national social data set proposed by the Expert Group includes the following 15 indicators:¹⁴

- (a) Population estimates by sex, age and (where appropriate and feasible) ethnic group;
- (b) Life expectancy at birth, by sex;
- (c) Infant mortality, by sex;
- (d) Child mortality, by sex;
- (e) Maternal mortality;
- (f) Percentage of infants weighing less than 2,500 grams at birth, by sex;
- (g) Average number of years of schooling completed, by urban/rural sex, and where possible, by income class;
- (h) Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita;
- (i) Household income per capita (level and distribution);
- (j) Monetary value of the basket of food needed for minimum nutritional requirements;¹
- (k) Unemployment rate, by sex;
- (l) Employment-population ratio, by sex, and (where appropriate) formal and informal sector;
- (m) Access to safe water;
- (n) Access to sanitation;
- (o) Number of people per room (excluding kitchen and bathroom).¹⁵

26. The data included in the proposed list should be classified according to rural and urban populations, particularly where the rural population accounts for more than 25 per cent of the total population.

27. It is worth noting that the proposed list does not include a compound index to measure poverty, owing to the fact that the Copenhagen Declaration calls on Member States to establish their own national poverty indices.

A. National social statistics

28. The Expert Group proposed a two-stage process to improve national social statistics capacity:

(a) Assessing national social statistics systems through a regional standard questionnaire distributed by the regional commissions to national statistical offices to collect information on the social statistics system and determine the availability of statistics related to the indicators included in the minimum national social data set;

(b) Building national capacity in social statistics systems through regional and international cooperation.

B. ESCWA programme of action for the development
of social statistics

29. In an attempt to provide the statistical data and indicators necessary to measure the progress achieved in realizing the objectives of United Nations conferences within the context of the findings of the Expert Group on the Statistical Implications of Recent Major United Nations Conferences, the ESCWA Statistical Committee proposes the following plan of action:

(a) Adoption by the ESCWA Statistical Committee of the minimum national social data set proposed by the Expert Group, taking into account the substitution of indicator (f) with the rate of use of family planning methods.

(b) Preparation by the ESCWA Statistical Committee, in cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division, of a basic questionnaire aiming at evaluating national social statistics systems and the availability of data types suggested by the Expert Group as well as the periodicity of such data.

(c) Choosing two of the States members to test and finalize the questionnaire.

(d) Extending the testing of the questionnaire to all States members.

(e) Preparing a regional report on the status of national social statistics systems in the ESCWA member States and making recommendations for their development.

(f) Contacting funding agencies, including UNDP, to secure support for national statistics projects aiming at providing data on a regular basis through the following:

(i) Conducting a population census every 10 years;

(ii) Conducting a housing census or sample survey every 10 years in rural areas and every five years in urban areas;

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- (iii) Conducting at least one demographic/health survey every five years;
- (iv) Publishing vital statistics on births and mortality at least once a year;
- (v) Conducting a survey on employment and unemployment at least once a year;
- (vi) Conducting a quarterly survey on foodstuff prices;
- (vii) Providing basic data on national accounts.

Annex

MENU OF INDICATORS*

The Expert Group compiled a list of 15 indicators to form a suggested minimum national social data set (MNSDS). These indicators (marked with bullets) are listed below, together with a number of other indicators (marked with a dash) that are also seen as valuable and relevant for monitoring and evaluating progress within the policy areas of recent major United Nations conferences.

General

- Population estimates by sex, age and (where appropriate and feasible) ethnic group

1. Population and development

- Life expectancy at birth, by sex
- Infant mortality, by sex
- Child mortality, by sex
- Maternal mortality
- Percentage of infants weighing less than 2,500 grams at birth, by sex
- Average number of years of schooling completed, by urban/rural, sex, and, where possible, by income classes
 - Percentage of pregnant women who have at least one antenatal visit
 - Percentage of pregnant women who have a trained attendant at delivery
 - Percentage of pregnant women immunized against tetanus
 - Contraceptive prevalence rate
 - Incidence and prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases
 - Quality of family planning services
 - Access to, and quality of, maternal health services

* The list of indicators is reprinted from the United Nations, "Report of the United Nations Expert Group on the Statistical Implications of the United Nations Summit Meetings" (New York, April 1996), pp. 20-22.

- Incidence of female genital mutilation

2. Eradicating poverty

- Physical and mental health
- Literacy
- Family conditions
- Unemployment
- Social exclusion and isolation
- Homelessness
- National and international causes underlying poverty

(a) Absolute poverty

- Number of people per room (excluding kitchen and bathroom)
- Access to safe water
- Access to sanitation
- Monetary value of the basket of food needed for minimum nutritional requirements
 - Percentage of the population in poverty (poverty or poverty line defined nationally)
 - Access to services related to health, nutrition, and community or environmental infrastructure
 - Income
 - Education
 - Possibility of entering the labour force
 - Food
 - Food prices
 - Access to productive assets, especially land and water

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- Geographic location
- Public transfers

(b) Relative poverty

- Families below a minimum standard of income (poverty line)
- Poverty gap
- Families with less than 25 per cent and 40 per cent of mean income
- Gini coefficients (summary measure of inequality in income distribution)
- Income share of lowest income quintile
- Income share of highest income quintile

3. Expansion of productive employment and
reduction of unemployment

- GDP per capita
- Household income per capita (level and distribution)
- Unemployment rate, by sex
- Employment-population ratio, by sex and (where appropriate) formal and informal sector
 - Wage employment as a percentage of the population aged 16-64, for males and females separately where possible
 - Formal sector employment as a percentage of total employment
 - Median and average length of job tenure in years, for males and females separately where possible
 - Index of real wages in manufacturing and in the economy as a whole where possible
 - Ratio of average wage in the formal sector to GDP (or total wage bill) per person employed in the economy
 - Wage dispersion in manufacturing industries, measured by the coefficient of variation, for males and females separately where possible

- Rate of average female to average male wage in manufacturing and in the economy as a whole where possible
- Unpaid work outside of the market economy
- Non-wage compensation (fringe benefits)
- Time-use
- Precariousness of employment
- Visible underemployment
- Invisible underemployment
- Training data, including informal kinds of training

4. Social integration

- Number of people in vulnerable groups
- Age/gender structure
- Occupational profile
- Economic activity profile
- Income levels
- Position within overall income distribution
- Housing standards/amenities, such as access to safe water, sanitation and floor space per person
- Health status, such as infant mortality rate, age-specific mortality rates, expectation of life and nutritional intake
- Educational standards, such as adult literacy rate, number of years of formal education and participation rates (for children)
- Crime victimization rate
- Proportion eligible to vote

5. Status of women and men

Data distributed by sex on:

- Population and households
- Health
- Diseases and causes of death
- Education
- Enrolment rates
- Drop-out rates
- Higher-level education by subject
- Time-use
- Child care
- Gainful employment
- Wage, salary and income
- Individual and household income
- Informal sector
- Income control
- Access to land and credit
- Influence and power
- Decision-making
- Time-use
- Violence and crime

NOTES

¹ United Nations, "Report of the Expert Group on the Statistical Implications of Recent Major United Nations Conferences (meeting held in New York, 16-19 April 1996), p. 2 (E/CN.3/AC.1/1996/R.4).

² United Nations, International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), 1994, Summary of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (New York, 1995), p. 6 (DPI/1618/POP-95-93124-March 1995-30M).

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⁴ United Nations, The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, World Summit for Social Development (New York, 1995), p. 14 (DPI/1707-9515294-August 1995-30M).

⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

⁷ United Nations, The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing from 4-15 September 1995, p. 118 (DPI/1766/WOM-95-39642-February 1996-30M).

⁸ United Nations, The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, World Summit for Social Development (New York, 1995), p. 18 (DPI/1707-9515294-August 1995-30M).

⁹ United Nations, The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing from 4-15 September 1995, p. 34 (DPI/1766/WOM-95-39642-February 1996-30M).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ ESCWA, Gender Statistics in the Arab Countries: Current Issues and Plans, a paper presented to the First Session of the ESCWA Statistical Committee, held in Amman from 6-9 November 1995, pp. 5-6 (E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/13).

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¹⁴ United Nations, "Report of the Expert Group on the Statistical Implications of Recent Major United Nations Conferences" (meeting held in New York from 16-19 April 1996), pp. 20-22 (E/CN.3/AC.1/1996/R.4).

¹⁵ Ibid.
