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STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Forty-sixth plenary session  
(Paris, 18-20 May 1998)

INFORMATION NOTE CONCERNING THE UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS

Submitted by UNESCO

1. For several years, many UNESCO Member States and the General Conference itself have been expressing their desire to see a strengthening, improvement and modernization of UNESCO's statistical services. In 1994, the Director-General sought the advice of the Board on International Comparative Studies in Education (BICSE) which conducted an in-depth review of the situation. The Director-General then consulted various experts - representatives of the Member States and of United Nations institutions and development agencies - concerning the follow-up to be given to these recommendations. This wide-ranging consultation process formed the basis of the elaboration of a strategic plan for the strengthening of UNESCO's statistical programmes and services.

2. The strategic plan was submitted to the Executive Board for consideration at its 152nd session (September 1997) and subsequently to the 29<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference (October - November 1997). The General Conference took note of the «Strategic plan for the strengthening of UNESCO's statistical programmes and services» (document 29C/57) and adopted the attached resolution (Annex).

3. As reflected in the adopted resolution, Member States insisted that the Director-General's report to the 154<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board (April - May 1998) on modalities for setting up the UNESCO Institute for Statistics should be based on consultations with national and international services and institutions. It should include information, not only on the financial and managerial aspects, but also on the proposed work programme and expected partners of the Institute, so as to facilitate, upon approval by the Board, the rapid implementation of the required transformation.

4. In appliance of this resolution, a consultation of all national statistical offices and institutes was launched to gather views concerning UNESCO's plan to strengthen its statistical services. This consultation was carried out with the assistance of the International Statistical Institute (ISI), a non-governmental organization which cooperates regularly with UNESCO. So far the thirty-two national institutes that have responded to this consultation are generally supportive of the establishment of the UNESCO Institute. Further information on the results of this consultation will be provided during the Conference since by then a more complete report will be available.

5. Consultations also took place with the Working Group of the United Nations Statistical Commission, during its meeting in February 1998 ; the Working Group decided to include an item regarding the UNESCO Institute on the agenda of the next session of the UN Statistical Commission (February 1999).

6. During these consultations and contacts, some concern was expressed concerning the name of the future Institute ; it was felt that the provisional name (UNESCO International Institute for Statistics) indicated in document 29C/57 could lead to some confusion in the international statistical community. Following this advice, the Director-General proposed to the Executive Board that the name « UNESCO Institute for Statistics » (USI) be adopted.

7. Upon the recommendation of a High-Level Mission formed specially in 1997 to advise the Director-General on strengthening UNESCO's statistical services, and with financial support from a World Bank grant, an international consultant<sup>1</sup> was commissioned to prepare proposals with regard to the future management structure and design of the USI. In preparing his report to the 154<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO Executive Board (April-May 1998), the Director-General has drawn extensively on the substantive recommendations made by the consultant which, it may be noted, confirm the main lines of the strategic plan for strengthening UNESCO's statistical programmes and services as outlined in document 29C/57.

8. To begin now the process of transforming the Division of statistics into a UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the Director-General has decided to constitute an Interim Steering Committee to examine proposals and oversee

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Quentin Thompson, from Coopers and Lybrand (London, U.K.), an internationally renowned firm for management consulting.

initial actions aimed at achieving this objective. This Committee which is an open-ended one, will function until the next session of the General Conference (1999), when the Governing Board of the Institute would be formally appointed.

9. The actual composition of the Steering Committee, which will meet for the first time on 16 April, is as follows:

Mr. R. V. Vaidayanatha Ayyar, Secretary to the Government of India,  
Department of Culture, India

Mr. Douglas Drew, Assistant Director, Culture, Tourism and Education  
Statistics, Statistics Canada

Mr. T. Holt, Director, Registrar General and Head of the Government  
Statistical Service, Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom

Mr. Carlos M. Jarque, President, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía  
e Informática, Mexico ; Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission

Ms. Teboho Moja, Special Adviser to the Minister of Education, Republic of  
South Africa

Ms. Maris O'Rourke, Director of Education, Human Development Department,  
World Bank

Mr. J. M. M. Ritzen, Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Netherlands,  
Chairman of the Interim Steering Committee

Mr. Moufid Shehab, Minister of Higher Education and Science and Technology,  
Arab Republic of Egypt

Mr. Claude Thélot, Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes  
Economiques - INSEE, France

10. The UNESCO Executive Board will examine, at its 154<sup>th</sup> session (April-May 1998) the detailed proposals of the Director-General on the Institute's objectives, work programme and administrative, managerial and financial aspects. By the time the Conference of European Statisticians meets, this report will be available for information as will the decisions taken by the Executive Board.

11. It may be useful to recall that the primary reason for establishing a UNESCO Institute for Statistics is to enable the Organization to provide dynamic and effective responses to the ever increasing demands that emanate from the Member States and the international community as a whole for more diversified, more policy-relevant and more reliable statistical products and services.

12. In the series of consultations undertaken since the extensive review by the Board on International Comparative Studies in Education (BICSE) in 1995, it has become clear that UNESCO should substantially reorient and upgrade its statistical services by developing higher professional standards and closer interaction with the Member States and partner agencies for the production, collection, dissemination and use of quality statistical information and indicators in support to policy and decision-making. It was considered that a UNESCO Institute for Statistics enjoying a wide intellectual autonomy as well as adequate administrative flexibility would be an appropriate mechanism to ensure quick responses to demands, therefore more policy relevance and

outward focus, better efficiency of operations, and the ability to mobilize new partnerships and extra-budgetary support. These were the concerns that led to the initial proposals made to the General Conference and embodied in document 29C/57.

13. The mission of the USI is to provide statistical information which will help decision-making in Member States and thereby enhance policy and programme development. Under this mission, Member States would be the prime, but not the only beneficiary of the Institute's action in the field of statistical information. Apart from the UNESCO programme sectors, there are other constituencies whose tasks is to help decision making in UNESCO's fields of competence and whose information needs should be served, such as the national statistics bureaux, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, regional intergovernmental organizations, development agencies, international research institutes, etc.

14. There are four important implications which flow from this updated definition of UNESCO's mission : (i) USI will need to establish which statistics are policy relevant and which are not; (ii) it will need to be responsive and flexible in defining and developing data and indicators; (iii) it will need to ensure that the data which it collects and makes available are reliable, sufficiently accurate for its purposes, and up to date; (iv) the processes for defining, collecting, analyzing and presenting statistics must be subject to strong and objective quality assurance.

15. To fulfil its mission, USI's efforts have to focus on three core objectives:

to foster the development of international statistics in its fields of interest in ways which reflect the changing policy contexts in those fields and which are reliable, robust and feasible to collect;  
to arrange for the collection, production, analysis and timely dissemination of policy-relevant statistics and indicators based on this development work;  
to support the development of the statistical and analytical capacities of Member States both for their own purposes, but also as a contribution to the achievement of the previous objective.

16. Each of these objectives is interlinked with the others and must address the four fields of competence of UNESCO : education ; science and technology ; culture ; and communication.

ANNEX

**Resolution adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its 29<sup>th</sup> session**  
**(October - November 1997)**

The General Conference

1. Noting the increasing demand from Member States and the international community for diversified, timely, reliable and policy-relevant statistical products and services in all UNESCO's fields of competence,
2. Conscious of the necessity to improve the statistical information base required to facilitate the monitoring of progress towards the goals set at major world conferences,
3. Considering the need to reinforce linkages with national statistical services and interested partner agencies, as well as to develop a highly participatory and interactive approach for the identification of indicators and for the collection and production of data, so as to guarantee their quality and their value to those formulating and evaluating policy,
4. Reaffirming that the central mission of UNESCO is to service both the Member States and the international community by providing quality statistical information in support of policy-making and of programme formulation and monitoring in the areas of education, science, culture and communication,
5. Convinced that in order to fulfil its mission, UNESCO should focus on
  - (a) supporting the development of statistical and related analytical capacities in Member States;
  - (b) fostering professional consensuses with respect to international standards of statistical quality and reliability;
  - (c) ensuring the worldwide collection, production, analysis and dissemination of reliable, policy-relevant data and indicators on education, science, culture and communication;
  - (d) fostering the production of analytical studies aimed at facilitating the quantitative and qualitative assessment of the current situation and future prospects in UNESCO's fields of action;
6. Aware of the need to reorient and upgrade UNESCO's statistical services in order to respond appropriately to the new demands and challenges, and to enforce high standards of accuracy and timeliness of data;
7. Noting that the strategic plan proposed by the Director-General to strengthen UNESCO's statistical services has been prepared on the basis of in-depth consultations held with various experts from Member States and representatives of United Nations institutions and development agencies,

8. Taking into account decision 3.2 adopted by the Executive Board at its 152nd session,

9. Authorizes the Director-General to commence, on an experimental basis, the establishment of structures and mechanisms aimed at transforming the Division of Statistics into a UNESCO International Institute for Statistics, with a view to formally adopting the Statutes of the Institute at its thirtieth session;

10. Invites the Director-General:

(a) to carry out further consultations with national and international statistical institutes;

(b) and taking into account the results of their consultations, to submit to the Executive Board, at its 154th session, for its approval, a detailed report and proposals on the Institute's objectives, work programme and administrative, managerial and financial aspects.

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