

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General
28 December 2000

Original: English

Statistical Commission**Thirty-second session**

6-9 March 2001

Item 6 (b) of the provisional agenda*

**Activities not classified by field: review of existing
statistical programmes in relation to United Nations
special years and observances****Existing statistical programmes in relation to selected
United Nations special years and observances****Report of the Secretary-General***Summary*

The present report reviews the following forthcoming special events: (a) Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries; (b) review of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s; (c) follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing; and (d) comprehensive review of Agenda 21. For each event, the major themes are highlighted and the statistical implications of these events are analysed. The Commission is invited to take this information into account when discussing the agenda for its next session and its multi-year programme of work.

* E/CN.3/2001/1.



Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries.....	1–5	x
A. Background.....	1–4	x
B. Statistical implications.....	5	x
II. Review of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.....	6–11	x
A. Background.....	6–9	x
B. Statistical implications.....	10–11	x
III. Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing.....	12–14	x
A. Background.....	12–13	x
B. Statistical implications.....	14	x
IV. Comprehensive review of Agenda 21.....	15–24	x
A. Background.....	15–19	x
B. Statistical implications.....	20–24	x

I. Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

A. Background

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/187 of 18 December 1997, decided to convene the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries at a high level. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was designated as the focal point for organizing the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which will be hosted by the European Union, in Brussels, from 14 to 20 May 2001.

2. The objectives of the conference are:

- To assess progress, at the country level, in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s,¹ adopted at the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which was held in Paris in 1990;
- To review the implementation of international support measures, particularly in the areas of official development assistance (ODA), debt, investment and trade;
- To consider the formulation and adoption of appropriate national and international policies and measures for sustainable development of least developed countries and their progressive integration into the world economy.

3. Forty-eight countries are currently designated by the United Nations as least developed countries. The list is reviewed every three years by the Economic and Social Council on the basis of the following criteria:

- Low income, as measured by the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita;
- Weak human resources, as measured by a composite index (Augmented Physical Quality of Life Index) based on indicators of life expectancy at birth, per capita daily calorie intake, combined primary and secondary school enrolment, and adult literacy;
- A low level of economic diversification, as measured by a composite index (economic diversification index) based on the share of manufacturing in GDP, the share of the labour

force in industry, annual per capita commercial energy consumption and UNCTAD's merchandise export concentration index.

4. Different criteria are used for inclusion in, and graduation from, the list. Furthermore, the criteria themselves are reviewed periodically. For instance, the Committee for Development Policy has recommended that the economic diversification index be replaced by an economic vulnerability index reflecting the main external shocks to which many low-income countries are subject, and incorporating the main structural elements of the countries' exposure to the shocks, including their smallness and lack of diversification.

B. Statistical implications

5. At this point, UNCTAD has not informed the United Nations Statistics Division about any anticipated specific statistical implications of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. However, it is expected that an evaluation of progress in the implementation of the conference goals will require the measurement of relevant statistical indicators against established benchmarks.

II. Review of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s

A. Background

6. The United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session (resolution 46/151, annex, sect. II) in 1991. The United Nations New Agenda represented an accord between African States and the international community, with each side committing itself to specific and far-reaching efforts to accelerate Africa's development process. Furthermore, in March 1996, the Secretary-General launched the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for the Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.

7. The implementation of the United Nations New Agenda was targeted at several priority areas, including:

- Economic reforms, including the effective mobilization and efficient utilization of domestic resources;
- Promotion of the private sector and foreign direct investment (FDI);
- Intensification of the democratization process and the strengthening of civil society;
- A solution to Africa's debt problem;
- Trade facilitation and market access;
- Diversification of African economies;
- Agricultural production, rural development and food security;
- Environment and development;
- Regional and subregional cooperation and integration;
- South-South cooperation.

8. The United Nations New Agenda also accorded special attention to human development and increased productive employment, and promoted rapid progress towards the achievement of human-oriented goals by the year 2000 in the areas of life expectancy, integration of women in development, child and maternal mortality, nutrition, health, water and sanitation, basic education, and shelter.

9. The United Nations New Agenda had a built-in mechanism for the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards its full implementation. Two progress reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda were submitted to the General Assembly, in September 1998 (A/53/390 and Add.1) and in September 2000 (A/55/350 and Add.1). The Assembly, in its resolution 54/234 of 22 December 1999, also requested an independent evaluation of the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda, to be conducted prior to its final review and appraisal in 2002. The independent evaluation and final review are being coordinated by the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries (OSCAL) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

B. Statistical implications

10. It is generally accepted that a systematic effort to collect as much information and data as possible from all African States and their development partners is essential both for the independent evaluation process and for the final review and appraisal of the United Nations New Agenda. OSCAL is in the process of identifying data areas and developing specifications for the type of information and data required for the final review. These are expected to include the following:

- Time-series of rates of economic and population growth since 1992;
- Statistics on poverty, education, health, environment and access to services etc.;
- Data on resource flows (ODA) into Africa.

11. Particularly relevant to the information and data requirements of the final review of the United Nations New Agenda is the capacity already built under the United Nations Special Initiative for data collection at the sectoral level. Progress reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations Special Initiative were presented in the spring of 1998, of 1999 and of 2000. These reports (E/AC.51/1998/7, E/AC.51/1999/6 and E/AC.51/2000/6) contain available information and analysis in a wide range of policy areas.

III. Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing

A. Background

12. The International Plan of Action on Ageing² was adopted by the World Assembly on Ageing (Vienna, 26 July-6 August 1982) and endorsed the same year by the General Assembly in its resolution 37/51 of 3 December 1982. The Second World Assembly on Ageing has now been convened for 2002 on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the first World Assembly. It will be devoted to the overall review of the outcome of the first World Assembly, as well as to the adoption of a revised plan of action and a long-term strategy on ageing, encompassing its periodic reviews, in the context of a society for all ages (General Assembly resolution 54/262 of 25 May 2000, para. 1).

13. The International Plan of Action on Ageing recommended, among other things, that international action, both multilateral and bilateral, should focus on data collection and analysis, training and education, and research.

B. Statistical implications

14. The Commission for Social Development is the intergovernmental body designated to review and appraise the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing every four years and to make proposal for updating it, as necessary. The recommendations and/or proposals made by the Commission regarding the monitoring of the implementation of the Plan and with specific relevance to data collection and analysis are summarized as follows:

(a) **Establishment of a permanent database accessible from the Internet**, of public policies on ageing, enabling continuous updating and access by Member States. The Government of the Netherlands provided the United Nations programme on ageing with technical support for establishing the database. A questionnaire aimed at collecting information for the database had been designed and sent in autumn 1999 to the governmental focal points on ageing, many of whom at that time were also the focal points for the International Year of Older Persons. The questionnaire included a section on ageing-related statistics such as:

- (i) The average income per person at age 60 or over;
- (ii) The percentage of the population aged 60 years or over that receive informal care at home;
- (iii) The percentage of the population aged 60 years or over that receive professional care at home;
- (iv) The percentage of the population aged 60 years or over in institutional facilities (for example, nursing homes, homes for the elderly and other institutional facilities);
- (v) The number of places in institutional facilities per 100,000 persons aged 60 years or over;

(vi) Whether there are nationally recognized research centres dealing with ageing in the country;

(vii) Whether there are graduate training centres dealing with ageing-related issues (including centres for geriatric training).

One of the limiting factors of the review and appraisal exercise of the International Plan of Action on Ageing is the low response rate to the questionnaires by Member States; and another derives from problems in respect of the interpretation of questions by Member States, making it difficult to produce comparable data;

(b) **Household surveys, among other approaches, to be used by the Commission for Social Development** to support the review and appraisal process, although they have not been used so far;

(c) Exploration of the idea of elaborating an **ageing-related development index** (ADI) to complement the ageing-specific indicators currently being used, such as life expectancy (at birth and at age 60), dependency ratios, retirement ages, adult literacy rates, morbidity trends, use of long-term care facilities and, statistics on active ageing showing the extent of older persons' contributions to the socio-economic and cultural development of communities and their roles in the maintenance of families. A meeting of the Ad hoc Support Group for the International Year of Older Persons, held in May 1998, was devoted to this issue with responsible officials of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Statistics Division, and the Population Division and Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. It was decided at that time that, owing to a lack of sufficient basic data in many countries, the introduction of an ageing-related development index would be premature.

IV. Comprehensive review of Agenda 21

A. Background

15. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio in 1992 adopted Agenda 21,³ the Rio Declaration on Environment and

Development⁴ and the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests (Forest Principles)⁵. In addition, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change⁶ and the Convention on Biological Diversity⁷ were also opened for signature. Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration in particular have served as a core reference for the global development agenda. The Commission on Sustainable Development was established by the Economic and Social Council in 1993, pursuant to a request by the General Assembly in 1992, with a mandate to review implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

16. The special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, held in 1997, reviewed progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 and produced a five-year Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21,⁸ focusing on gaps in the current international environmental agenda and strengthening the implementation of Agenda 21 in a comprehensive manner. The participants at the special session also committed to ensuring that the next comprehensive review of Agenda 21 in the year 2002 would demonstrate greater measurable progress in achieving sustainable development.

17. The General Assembly, at its fifty-fifth session in 2000, decided to organize in 2002 the 10-year review of progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at the summit level to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable development (Assembly resolution 55/199 of 20 December 2000). The Assembly also decided to call the review the "World Summit on Sustainable Development", and accepted the offer of South Africa to host the summit.

18. In the same resolution, the General Assembly also decided that in 2002 the Commission on Sustainable Development, acting as the preparatory committee for the Summit, should hold three sessions. At its first and second sessions, to be held in January and March 2002, respectively, the preparatory committee should undertake the comprehensive review and assessment of progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. Drawing

upon the results of this review, the third and final substantive preparatory session, to be held at the ministerial level in May 2002, should prepare a concise and focused document to be submitted for further consideration and adoption at the 2002 Summit. That document should reinvigorate, at the highest political level, the global commitment to a North-South partnership and a higher level of international solidarity in the accelerated implementation of Agenda 21 and the promotion of sustainable development.

19. Also in resolution 55/199, the General Assembly invited relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations and international financial institutions involved with the implementation of Agenda 21 to participate fully in the entire 10-year review process, in order to reflect their experiences and the lessons learned as well as to provide ideas and proposals for the way forward for the further implementation of Agenda 21 in relevant areas.

B. Statistical implications

20. Agenda 21 addresses the needs for regular data and information in chapter 40 entitled "Information for decision-making" and in chapter 8 entitled "Integrating environment and development in decision-making", section D ("Establishing systems for integrated environmental and economic accounting"). Both chapters assign tasks for the United Nations Statistics Division in implementation. Accordingly, the United Nations Statistics Division has to participate in the comprehensive review of the progress achieved in the implementation of chapters 40 and 8 of Agenda 21.

21. In the area of environmental/economic accounting, the United Nations Statistics Division has produced, in line with the request of Agenda 21, the *Handbook of national accounting: Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting*,⁹ commonly referred to as the System for Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA), and *Handbook of National Accounting: Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting: An Operational Manual*¹⁰ co-authored with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The United Nations Statistics Division is currently working in cooperation with the London Group on Environmental Accounting on the revision of the SEEA; and on a handbook on integrated environmental and economic accounting for fisheries jointly with the Food and Agriculture Organization of

the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations University (UNU). The United Nations Statistics Division has also been active in national capacity-building by undertaking several country projects and by organizing several regional and international workshops jointly with UNEP, UNDP and the World Bank. Environmental accounting was identified as one of the priority areas for the United Nations in the report of the Secretary-General to the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations (A/54/2000) entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century", which recommended that countries consider implementing the SEEA in order to integrate environmental issues into mainstream economic policy.

22. Chapter 40 of Agenda 21 highlights the needs for data and indicators at local, provincial, national and international levels. Accordingly, the chapter involves a wide variety of actors. The core statistical implications refer to the development of indicators of sustainable development and the promotion of their use as well as to the respective data collection and assessment. Considering the actual situation in developing countries, all the mentioned activities require considerable strengthening in the national capacity.

23. The United Nations Statistics Division and Commission on Sustainable Development activities have supported the above-mentioned statistical goals. The United Nations Statistics Division has put efforts into the methodological developments and into the data collection of environment statistics and indicators. The Commission has focused on the development of the indicators for sustainable development. Country projects testing the proposed indicators have contributed to prioritization reflected in the core list of 58 indicators for sustainable development, for which new methodology sheets are also being prepared. The United Nations Statistics Division is compiling the Pilot Compendium of Environment Statistics and Indicators which will be coming out on a biannual basis and will also include the Commission indicators. The Compendium will be based on data from the United Nations Statistics Division Questionnaire on Environment Statistics and Indicators and on other international sources. As regards national capacity-building, the United Nations Statistics Division is preparing a Manual of Environment Statistics to provide countries with methodological guidance on how to develop basic environment statistics on a

regular basis and how to assure their compatibility with socio-economic statistics. Regional workshops on data collection and indicator compilation will further strengthen national capacities to respond to both national and international demands for statistics and indicators.

24. Chapter 40 issues were discussed in the international expert group meeting held in Ottawa in September 2000. The meeting produced a list of specific recommendations of which several referred to the needs for (a) harmonization and coordination and (b) strengthening national capacities in the production of data and indicators for sustainable development. The ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and its inter-sessional meetings will have the implementation of chapter 40 in their agenda in April 2001.

Notes

¹ See *Report of the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Paris, 3-14 September 1990* (A/CONF.147/18), part one.

² See *Report of the World Assembly on Ageing, Vienna, 26 July-6 August 1982* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.82.I.16), chap. VI, sect. A.

³ *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolution Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

⁴ *Ibid.*, annex I.

⁵ *Ibid.*, annex III.

⁶ A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1, and Corr.1, annex I.

⁷ See United Nations Environment Programme, *Convention on Biological Diversity* (Environmental Law and Institution Programme Activity Centre), June 1992.

⁸ General Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex.

⁹ *Studies in Methods*, No. 61 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.XVII.12).

¹⁰ *Studies in Methods*, No. 78 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.00.XVII.17).