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Statistical Committee
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Item 8 of the agenda

DECENTRALIZATION OF STATISTICAL DUTIES AT ESCWA

THE NEW STATISTICS SUBPROGRAMME

1. At its twenty-first session, held in May 2001, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) recommended that the programme of work should be reviewed and should focus on a limited number of priorities, in order to serve regional integration.
2. Accordingly, ESCWA identified four priority areas for the region, namely, water management, technology, globalization and social policies. The necessary amendments were made to the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 and the programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2002-2003, and divisions were restructured in line with priorities and programmes.
3. At its fourth special session, held on 11 March 2002, ESCWA adopted resolution 238 (S-IV) entitled "Revised medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 and revised programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2002-2003", thereby adopting the said revised plan and programme.
4. The restructuring plan focused on strengthening the ESCWA statistics programme, with a view to enabling it to participate in both the production and development of precise, up-to-date statistical data utilizable for the purpose of international comparisons and consistent with international classifications and standards, and in the preparation of all the statistical indicators necessary to meet local needs and assist policy and decision makers in member countries.
5. In May 2002 ESCWA submitted those documents to the Committee for Programme and Coordination, and they were approved.
6. The ESCWA restructuring process was completed with the amalgamation of the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division and the Agricultural and Industry Sections, and the establishment of the Information and Communication Technology Division, the Economic Analysis Division and the Globalization and Regional Integration Division, which includes transport.
7. Statistical activities were decentralized, bringing together those with technical and statistical expertise, in order to ensure consistency and standardization in concepts, practices and use. Statistical activities were merged with the substantive and technical activities of the relevant divisions, as appropriate.
8. The secretariat adopted a new strategy, which entails ESCWA cooperating with the United Nations Statistics Division and all the international agencies with respect to databases, and becoming involved in their preparation in order to ensure the conformity of concepts and classifications, avoid inconsistency or

incompatibility in the data, reduce expense and save time. This strategy is based upon the following elements:

(a) Implementing the reform programme instituted by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, which calls for duplication and repetition to be avoided, thereby avoiding the waste of resources, efforts and time;

(b) Ensuring that capacities and resources are commensurate with the activities for which divisions are responsible;

(c) Implementing the recommendation of the twenty-first session of ESCWA.

9. A working group was established in order to direct the work of subprogramme 6, entitled "Comparable statistics for improved planning and decision making", which includes statisticians from the divisions and has the following responsibilities:

(a) To coordinate the statistical activities of the divisions and ensure the consistency and soundness of statistical work;

(b) To coordinate and harmonize the standards adopted in statistical work at ESCWA;

(c) To coordinate statistical work in accordance with the needs of the technical divisions.

10. A Statistics Coordination Unit has been established, which forms part of the bureau of the Executive Secretary and is headed by the Deputy Executive Secretary. It has the following duties:

(a) To provide secretariat services to the working group responsible for directing the work of the statistics programme;

(b) To coordinate between divisions;

(c) To coordinate and maintain contacts with Governments and international governmental and non-governmental organizations;

(d) To make the organizational arrangements for the sessions of the Statistical Committee.

11. The statistical programme is structured as set forth below:

(a) The Deputy Executive Secretary supervises statistical activity;

(b) Government contacts are conducted through the Deputy Executive Secretary;

(c) Statistical experts in each division liaise with heads of division;

(d) Internal communications are conducted through the Statistics Coordination Unit;

(e) The Statistics Coordination Unit makes the arrangements for statistical meetings;

(f) The working group responsible for directing the work of the statistics programme deals with substantive issues.