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**Programme on Statistics and Data: overview and way forward****Summary**

The present document provides an overview of the Programme on Statistics and Data, funded through the tenth tranche of the United Nations Development Account. It focuses mainly on recommendations made after the mid-term evaluation of the Programme, including its one-year extension until December 2021, an additional allocation of \$1.4 million, management responses to qualitative evaluation recommendations, and remaining activities to be executed by the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) before the conclusion of the Programme. Activities undertaken since the twelfth session of the Statistical Committee are reported on in document E/ESCWA/C.1/2019/3(Part II) on activities implemented in the field of statistics under the ESCWA programme of work, which is presented to the current session in item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda.

The Statistical Committee is invited to take note of the present document and provide recommendations for ESCWA work under the Programme on Statistics and Data for the next three years.

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Introduction

1. The United Nations Development Account, established in 1997 pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/12 B, is a capacity development programme of the United Nations Secretariat aimed at building the capacity of developing countries in the priority areas of the United Nations development agenda. The Development Account is funded from the Secretariat's regular budget and implemented by 10 Secretariat entities, namely the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

2. In 2014, the statistics functions of the 10 Secretariat entities decided to create a comprehensive programme for building statistical capacities in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Programme on Statistics and Data was approved by the Steering Committee of the United Nations Development Account and included in the tenth tranche corresponding to the execution period 2017-2019. The overall budget of the Programme is \$10 million. It is divided into the following pillars and components:

Pillar 1. Means of implementation (managerial issues of official statistics and statistical information infrastructure);

Pillar 2. Environment statistics;

Pillar 3. Social and demographic statistics:

Component 3.1. Population and demographic

Component 3.2. Gender

Component 3.3. Poverty

Component 3.4. Peaceful and inclusive society;

Pillar 4. Economic statistics.

3. The Programme is centrally managed by the Technical Advisory Group representing each of the 10 entities, and each pillar/component has a lead/co-lead to communicate with respective implementing entities concerned with a specific component. This management structure ensures close cooperation and coherence of statistical capacity development across the United Nations Secretariat, while taking into account specific needs at the regional level (through regional commissions), and the particularities of subject matter areas such as environment (through UNEP), human settlements (UN-Habitat), crime (UNODC) and external trade (UNCTAD).

I. OUTCOME OF THE PROGRAMME'S MID-TERM EVALUATION

4. A mid-term evaluation of the Programme was carried out in the period July-October 2018, and a final evaluation report was submitted in November 2018. The evaluation was led by Mr. Hallgrimur Snorrason, former Chief Statistician of Iceland. It included the following steps: review of documentation, interviews with managers, leads, co-leads and focal points of the Programme, and a survey of beneficiaries.

5. According to the evaluation's findings, the Programme has progressed well. Activities are largely on track, despite delays in the inception of the Programme, and there are strong indications that all projected activities will be completed as initially planned. The evaluation report also acknowledges that the Programme has brought about innovative and increased cooperation between the 10 Secretariat entities and other

organizations,¹ adding both substance and resources² to the Programme. These additional resources, in-kind and in cash, quantified in the Programme's final evaluation report, explain the spread between the number of outputs completed and the consumed budget.

6. The mid-term evaluation resulted in the following recommendations:

(a) *Role of leads/co-leads of pillars*: For future programmes, the role of leads/co-leads should be clearly defined, including their responsibility and authority. Moreover, this role should be assigned to experts who are given enough time and space to assume their leadership – it is currently performed by staff of the entities in addition their regular duties;

(b) *The Technical Advisory Group*: The current Technical Advisory Group should play a decisive management, coordination and leadership role during the remainder of the Programme. The Group's role should be made clear to all Programme actors. Moreover, the Group's name misnomer and should be changed. Originally, it was proposed that the Group be called a steering committee; however, to avoid confusion with the Steering Committee of the United Nations Development Account, the current name was chosen but this designation does not reflect its leading and management role;

(c) *Financial management*: The high degree of flexibility in moving funds between budget lines is vital for the effective and efficient implementation of the Programme. The rules on flexibility in the Programme must be made clear to all leads and co-leads of components, especially the finance officers of implementing entities. It is also recommended that for future programmes, a financial committee may be established to clarify rules, restrictions and degrees of flexibility;

(d) *Staff travel*: Care should be taken not to underfund or keep narrow restrictions on the budget for staff travel in such a large and long-lasting programme, which involves several collaborating entities and extensive external cooperation;

(e) *Role of the global coordinator*: The role of global Programme coordinator was assumed by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). The Director of UNSD currently chairs the Technical Advisory Group. According to the evaluation, the role of the global coordinator should be clarified to all actors in the Programme, and the global coordinator should report directly to the Chair of the Technical Advisory Group;

(f) *Factsheets*: Factsheets are concise reports on the status of each activity through the life cycle. The evaluator recommended to further improve the quality of factsheets to ensure a more even quality of reporting on the Programme's remaining activities. This recommendation has already been implemented by the Technical Advisory Group;

(g) *Completion of the Programme*: It was also recommended that activities be completed by December 2019 and that closing regional workshops be held in early 2020. Since the evaluation, the Programme has been extended by a year (see below) and those dates have been adjusted to December 2020 and early 2021, respectively. The external evaluator recommended that the allocation of eventual savings realized in the current Programme be done according to the following criteria:

¹ Although the Programme is being implemented by the 10 entities, other relevant regional and global statistical organizations were invited to participate in certain activities.

² The Programme has brought additional resources that may be used to boost statistical development in connection with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. However, due to a shortcoming in Development Account financial rules, those additional resources do not comprise human resources. This creates pressure on some of the implementing agencies, mainly the statistics divisions of regional commission that are understaffed, as evidenced by the thematic evaluation of regional commissions undertaken by the Office of Internal Oversight Services in 2017 (E/AC.51/2017/8).

- Savings should be based on plans for specific activities within the confines of the Programme, but not allocated proportionally to different components and entities;
- Plans for specific activities should be set out clearly in factsheets and accompanied by cost estimates;
- Activities funded by the savings should be continuations or follow-up activities of those planned and implemented under the Programme;
- Care must be taken that plans for activities are realistic in the sense that they can be carried out during the remainder of the Programme's period;

(h) *Extension of the Programme*: The evaluator recommended an extension of the Programme, and that additional funds be allocated and used for capacity-building activities at the national level and for expanding the scope of beneficiaries from originally identified pilot countries to additional ones.

II. MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO THE MID-TERM EVALUATION

7. At its meeting on 30 November 2018, the Technical Advisory Group considered the recommendations made by the external evaluator. It welcomed the recommendations and suggested to the Steering Committee of the Development Account to extend the Programme by one year and allocate any residuals, up to \$1.4 million, from other capacity development projects for additional activities.

8. Based on this recommendation, at its meeting on 14 December 2018, the Steering Committee approved the one-year extension until 31 December 2020 and the allocation of additional funds up to \$1.4 million.

9. The extension will allow the Programme to address requests for specific activities to be conducted at the country level. It will also allow for stocktaking and sharing of identified good practices and lessons learned during Programme implementation; for example, through supplementary e-learning courses and guidelines, as well as (sub-)regional workshops. Additional activities should be implemented as of April 2019 up to the end of the September 2020, to allow enough time to organize concluding regional workshops.

10. The Technical Advisory Group proposed that additional activities be financed through savings, and that residual funds be submitted to the Group based on detailed factsheets and budget estimates, along with the 2018 end-of-year report in February 2019. Activities to be financed through savings should fall within the scope of the original Programme Document as extensions of already proposed activities. They should be included in an addendum to the Programme Document with a corresponding logframe.

11. On 30 November 2018, the Technical Advisory Group endorsed an updated section of the Programme Document on the economic pillar and its logframe, and submitted it to the Steering Committee of the United Nations Development Account.

12. Members of the Technical Advisory Group will enforce and strengthen monitoring, reporting and evaluation, and collect success stories to illustrate the impact of the Programme.

13. Members of the Technical Advisory Group emphasized that the complexity of the Programme required a fundamental reconsideration of governance, coordination and monitoring mechanisms and tools, as compared with traditional entity-driven projects. To overcome this complexity and to enhance coherence across implementing entities, it was decided to develop a governance, coordination and monitoring matrix to enable collaboration and synergies across the traditional boundaries of the 10 implementing entities.

14. The governance structure of the Programme proved to be functioning well. Too much rigidity and bureaucracy in the governance of the Programme would hamper the capacity of actors to be agile and adapt to

changing circumstances, and ultimately to deliver. The Technical Advisory Group believes that to smoothly implement the Programme, it is important, from a programmatic and financial viewpoint, to secure a common understanding among all stakeholders of the degree of flexibility needed to conduct activities across the 10 implementing entities. Budget and finance officers in the entities should be informed of the specific programmatic and financial modalities of the Programme.

III. ACTIVITIES TO BE IMPLEMENTED BY ESCWA

15. The following activities will be implemented by the ESCWA secretariat before the closure of the Programme. The list is based on the Programme's workplan as of 15 December 2018. Additional activities may be considered, subject to approval by the Technical Advisory Group, since the extension of time and funding was approved by the Steering Committee. The Arabic translation of the Generic Statistical Law was distributed to ESCWA member States on 14 December 2018. A translation of SDG metadata (tier I and tier II indicators) was completed and is currently under review, and an electronic portal will be rolled out.

Pillar/Component	Activity
Pillar 1: Means of implementation	<p>A.1.3 Regional workshops on data disaggregation;</p> <p>A.1.4 Fact-finding, advocacy and advisory missions to target countries – missions to Jordan and Morocco;</p> <p>A.1.5 National workshops and seminars – (includes follow-up on the recommendations of previous meeting: translation of SDG metadata and Statistical Law);</p> <p>A.2.1 Regional workshops on integration of administrative data, big data and geospatial information for the compilation of SDG indicators;</p> <p>A.2.3 Regional workshops on data and metadata sharing and exchange.</p>
Pillar 2: Environment	<p>A.1.1 National workshop on environment statistics and the SDGs for national statistical offices and most national stakeholders in two countries, in cooperation with UNSD and the United Nations country teams;</p> <p>A.1.5 Advisory mission to the Syrian Arab Republic on environment statistics to provide support for a review of the status of environmental statistics to help assess environment damages due to conflict;</p> <p>A.1.2 Two regional workshops on environment statistics and the SDGs to support the work of the Arab Working Group on Environment and Sustainable Development Indicators and the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development;</p> <p>A.1.3 Blended training module (online plus a regional workshop) on monitoring the environmental dimension of the SDGs – translation into Arabic of the online module.</p>

Pillar/Component	Activity
Pillar 3: Social and demographic statistics Component 3.1: Population and demographic	<p>A.2.1 Technical meeting to review country experiences and develop practical guidelines on measuring completeness and quality assessment, and a pilot study on the completeness of death registration in Jordan and the State of Palestine;</p> <p>A.2.3 Advisory missions in targeted countries to establish systems for measuring completeness levels in registration and assessing registration data: missions to Iraq, Jordan, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic;</p> <p>A.3.1 Technical meetings to assess gaps in the production of human settlements indicators, including the use of spatial data; and to develop tools and guidelines for improvement: specialized workshop on urban SDG spatial indicators;</p> <p>A.3.2 Regional training workshops on the collection, analysis and reporting of human settlement indicators, including the use of spatial data: missions to Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.</p>
Pillar 3: Social and demographic statistics Component 3.2: Gender	<p>A.5.4 Provide technical support to surveys on violence against women (VAW) and develop the Arab questionnaire and toolkit on VAW, and deliver technical training and consultation to produce tier II indicators on VAW in Egypt and Morocco;</p> <p>A.4.3 Support the first group of countries organizing their first national training workshops with producers and users of gender statistics based on the ESCWA gender statistics curriculum (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Tunis), and a training of trainers for the second group of countries to establish training teams (Gulf Cooperation Council countries, State of Palestine and Yemen).</p>
Pillar 3: Social and demographic statistics Component 3.3: Poverty and inequality	<p>A.6.1 Conduct desk studies on the availability of information and data gaps in existing household surveys as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory mission to Jordan to collect information; • Study on measuring perceived discrimination; • Study on the limits of data disaggregation in household surveys for population subgroups and geographical areas; <p>A.6.2 Advisory missions to target countries to improve availability of information and comparability in household surveys: Egypt, Jordan, Oman, State of Palestine, Sudan and Tunisia;</p> <p>A.6.3 Regional workshops to discuss implementation of strategies on household surveys: workshop on measurement of poverty and inequality in Arab countries;</p> <p>A.7.1 Conduct desk studies on the availability of information and data gaps in existing household surveys: study on the availability of information on the different dimensions of poverty and access to basic services and proposals for their inclusion in current household surveys.</p>

Pillar/Component	Activity
Pillar 3: Social and demographic statistics Component 3.4: Peaceful and inclusive society	ESCWA does not participate in this component due to a lack of internal capacity (human resources). This component focuses on drugs and crime, while the focus of the ESCWA secretariat is conflict, occupation and recovery.
Pillar 4: Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A.2.2 Advisory missions to target countries to implement applications that support the collection, dissemination, notification and exchange of data relevant for measuring economic statistics related SDG indicators; • Subregional workshop on supply and use tables (SUTs); • Advisory mission to follow up on the construction of SUTs in Bahrain (started in 2017); • Filling gaps in the informal sector from SUTs: a subregional workshop on informal sector coverage.

IV. ACTION BY THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

16. The Statistical Committee is invited to undertake the following:

(a) Take note of the document and provide comments and recommendations on the future involvement of ESCWA in the Programme until December 2020;

(b) Provide the secretariat with recommendations for expanded activities, given the one-year extension and additional funding.
