

Coordination Meeting of Organizations Active in Statistical Work in the GCC Region

Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

21 April 2015

Meeting Minutes

Overview

GCC-Stat convened the meeting with an aim to help improve coordination and cooperation among international and regional statistical organizations, in an effort to promote consistency in statistical practices, management of statistical activities in accordance with agreed principles and foundations, and emergence of a better-coordinated statistical system and the dissemination of high quality statistics.

The topics discussed in the meeting included reviewing the regional statistical progress and developments, GCC-Stat's statistical strategy and action plan, and discussing possible cooperation opportunities in an aim to establish a common and harmonized agenda for developing statistical capacities in the GCC region.

Objectives of the meeting

- Coordination of efforts in statistics and statistical capacity development in the GCC region, through coordination mechanisms to be agreed;
- Coordination of training needs assessments and training plans;
- Sharing of experiences and knowledge;
- Harmonization of data and information collection from GCC countries;
- Sharing of information on upcoming activities (2015-2016);
- Reduction of burden on countries.

Participating institutions

- Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Center of Islamic Countries (SESRIC)
- Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS)
- Arab Monetary Fund (AMF)
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA)
- International Labor Organization Regional Office (ILO)
- United Nations Population Fund GCC office (UNFPA)
- United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization Office in Oman (FAO)
- Middle East and North Africa Center for Investment (MCI)

Proposed Agenda

1. Opening Remarks
2. Adoption of the agenda
3. Statistical progress and development in the GCC countries
4. Participating organizations present their main statistical activities in the GCC region

5. Discussion of cooperation and coordination opportunities
6. Discussion of a proposal to agree a common questionnaire to collect official statistics from the GCC countries
7. Proposal to establish a Joint Coordination Committee
8. Other topics

Minutes

1. Opening Remarks

GCC-Stat Director General made a brief speech of the general expectations of the meeting.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted as proposed.

3. Statistical progress and development in the GCC countries.

The Director of Population and Social Studies at GCC-Stat, Ms. Duaa Sultan, made a short introduction of the GCC Statistical System and GCC-Stat, and highlighted the GCC-Stat Strategy 2015-2020 and the Work Program for 2015-16.

4. Participating organizations present their main statistical activities in the GCC region.

A round table introduction of participating institutions took place.

- The ILO representative briefed the participants on ILO's main activities, which include development and implementation of regional adaptation of classification of occupations, Labour Force Survey support to member countries, migration statistics, as well as maintaining the Arab database. The existing collaboration with GCC-Stat in the LFS was acknowledged and welcomed.
- The FAO representative emphasized the support and welcomed collaboration in statistics covering agricultural and rural development. The representative discussed the existing collaboration with NBS of UAE regarding a soon-to-be-launched FAO CountryStat page for UAE. Similar work could be repeated in other GCC member countries, and could be an area of collaboration with GCC-Stat. FAO has been working with Oman in Food security and Food Balance sheet statistics, another area of potential further collaboration. The representative also stressed the importance of FAO's Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, and recommended that GCC-Stat be involved in its ongoing implementation in the region.
- The AMF representative described the process of obtaining member country statistics through their own surveys to central banks and through other international organizations, and the efforts made to overcome some of the discrepancies between the data that may appear occasionally. The AMF has a curriculum of training and workshop activities resulting in action plans for some member countries, Qatar in particular in the GCC. AMF seeks feedback from Central Banks on capacity development needs (including statistics) and incorporates that into their own action plan. An area of immediate collaboration could be the coordination of some of the training activities.
- The Director General of AITRS emphasized the 40-year history of the Institute as a key regional player in official statistics. They provide topical and general statistical training, often with collaboration with other institutions such as UNSD, and conduct statistical research. AITRS also has a diploma certificate program for junior statisticians, provide workshops and training course – now increasingly through e-

learning modules as well. Virtual training is geared towards more junior staff, while face-to-face trainings target senior officials of member country statistical institutions.

- The representative of UNFPA indicated that priority areas include reproductive health, youth development, gender equality as well as humanitarian issues. They provide technical statistical services for line ministries as well as for GCC statistical offices. In particular, their recent collaboration has been with CDSI of Saudi Arabia and Qatar statistics office on capacity development in population statistics issues, while Kuwait and UAE are potential new partners with UNFPA. The ICPD provides a framework for their statistical capacity development activities. He also identified population census and capacity development in civil registration as areas of potential collaboration.
- The UNESCWA representative indicated that his institution manages a broad statistical capacity development program both topically and sub-regionally. They also assist in institutional set-up of national statistical systems and are currently engaged in developing measures for impact of statistical capacity development, as well as developing of a statistical database for the region and building partnerships in order to more efficiently provide support in statistical capacity development. Topically, UNESCWA works with UNSD on NSDS development, sustainable development (and post 2015 Development Agenda), in addition to other cross-cutting and region-specific topics with lesser emphasis on the global agenda. Population and Business Registers are particular areas of potential collaboration with GCC-Stat in addition to UN led global topics. Also, UNESCWA mentioned benefits of sharing data collection and household surveys as an area of common interest.
- The Director General of SESRIC made a brief presentation of his institution, which is the statistical arm of the OIC, and works closely with the Islamic Development Bank. The upcoming OIC Statistical Commission meeting, scheduled in May 2015, is an immediate opportunity to foster further ties with GCC-Stat and other participants in the meeting. SESRIC has a broad, country targeted training program in various topics, which delivered some 50 trainings last year. They also have a Certification and Accreditation Program for Official Statisticians (OIC-CPOS), yet another area of further potential collaboration with GCC-Stat. Additional areas for SESRIC are a Tobacco Survey, Islamic Banking and finance statistics, as well as a Peer Assessment process which could also be of interest to GCC-Stat.
- The MCI provides training and technical assistance in statistical development. In collaboration with UNCTAD and GCC-Stat, they are developing common Foreign Direct Investment and Portfolio Investment survey framework. This is an area of possible technical cooperation with GCC-Stat.

5. Discussion of cooperation and coordination opportunities

The discussion concentrated around the topic of E-Learning, and ways and means of sharing knowledge and experiences. In particular, the following items were discussed:

- Sharing information on training and capacity development in general (activities, schedules);
- Sharing information on important meetings that could be of interest to others (conferences, workshops, etc.);
- Sharing databases and data collection tools and formats, with an aim to lessen the burden to countries and to improve coherence;
- Diploma certification and master's program in Official Statistics in the region;
- Develop Business and Civil registries (key for social and economic statistics) and use of population register for statistical purposes;

- Peer assessment mechanism (SESRIC, Eurostat);
- Translation of important manuals/guidelines;
- Harmonize collection of information on training and capacity development needs from countries;
- The National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS), particularly in view of the future requirements for the post-2015 development agenda;
- Improve dissemination, communication, awareness raising in the region.

A particular agreement was made on sharing e-learning experiences and providing proposals for future collaboration within the group. GCC-Stat will follow up with a formal request on the topic.

6. Discussion of a proposal to agree a common questionnaire to collect official statistics from the GCC countries

GCC-Stat stressed the importance of establishing close data collection coordination as a mean to reduce the burden on the countries, increase data coherence between institutions, and as a tool to steer the capacity development priorities in the region. The idea of a common regional questionnaire was welcomed by all participating institutions as a potential long-term goal, stressing that practical issues on data sharing can be overcome.

GCC-Stat proposed a Workshop on developing the idea of unified questionnaire further. Prior to that, all institutions should share their questionnaires and continue data collection. UNESCWA proposed the National Accounts as an area to start this process.

SESRIC also mentioned their capacity development survey, which could also lead to a joint questionnaire to support needs assessment for development of statistics.

7. Proposal to establish a Joint Coordination Committee

An agreement was reached to establish a Joint Coordination Committee. GCC-Stat will draft terms of reference for this committee, and initially communicate through focal points to be established in each organization. An annual meeting of the Joint Committee was proposed, while coordination activities could proceed with electronic communication.

8. Other topics

No other topics was raised.

GCC-Stat thanked the participating institutions for their valuable input and willingness for collaboration. The meeting adjourned.