

First Session of the OIC Statistical Commission

11-12 April 2011, Istanbul – Turkey

FINAL REPORT

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FINAL REPORT OF THE FIRST SESSION OF OIC-STATISTICAL COMMISSION

The First Session of the Organisation of Islamic Conference Statistical Commission (OIC-StatCom) was held on 11–12 April 2011 in Istanbul at the Hilton Hotel. The National Statistical Offices (NSO) of the OIC member states agreed to organise their future meetings under the “OIC Statistical Commission” title in the last NSO Meeting in 2010. This recommendation was approved by the 26th Session of the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC) of the OIC in October 2010. This first session of the OIC-StatCom focused on a clear direction, objectives, goals and expected benefits as well as areas where the Commission can generate added value for the benefit of statistical systems of the member countries of OIC.

List of participants is attached.

The agenda of the meeting were addressed through four sessions as follows:

1. OIC-StatCom: Expectations, Goals, and Operational Principles
2. Effective Cooperation for Statistical Capacity Building
3. Enhancing Statistical Awareness and Outreach
4. Concerted Efforts, New Prospects and Future Challenges in Statistics

After recitation of verses from the Holy Qur’an, the meeting began with an opening ceremony during which several speeches were delivered.

The speech of Secretary General of OIC, H.E. Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, was read by Mr. Jakhongir Khasanov. The Secretary General of OIC affirmed in his speech that the First Session of OIC-StatCom was taking place at a crucial period in the history of OIC. He stressed the crucial role that cooperation in the field of planning, knowledge sharing and exchange of best practices in socio-economic development of OIC member countries. The problems faced by member states are related to inadequate capacity for planning and statistics, compounded by the lack of coordination among member countries and regional institutions, lack of human resources and inadequate financial resources and lack of strategy for the efficient design of statistical activities. He requested the OIC-StatCom to avoid traditional pitfalls by ensuring that decisions taken at the Commission are reflected in various national priorities. In this sense, he asked that the issue of statistical capacity building be addressed by the OIC-StatCom as a matter of great importance in the context of bridging the gaps often found in economic and social statistics quality. He stressed not only the importance of coordination for the improvement of statistics, but also the importance of respecting procedures for active cooperation with the international statistical community. He concluded by wishing a fruitful discussion of the OIC-StatCom.

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The remarks by Mr. Paul Cheung of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) have reflected the commitment of the OIC, consisting of 57 member states, to develop statistics and interest of OIC member states in building solid statistical systems. He noted that the OIC-StatCom is the largest intergovernmental body on statistics after the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC). He highlighted the significant increase in the demand for statistics at national and international levels, which require different statistical agencies are working together to meet the demands of the moment. In this regard, he stressed the interest of the member states to the UNSC has significantly risen as the representation of member countries of the OIC at UNSC increased from 18 in 2005 to 36 in 2011.

Like Mr. Paul Cheung, Dr. Abdullateef Bello of the IDB noted that the demand for quality statistics is on the rise beside the varying levels of development with diverse challenges across NSOs of the OIC member states. He went on to say that several efforts have been made at OIC level to bring NSOs address the challenges facing them especially in the area of data collection, processing and dissemination. He also appealed to the NSOs of the OIC member states for working together to define objectives, expectations and rules of procedure of the OIC-StatCom.

After his welcoming remarks, Dr. Savas Alpay, Director General of SESRIC, noted the interest of member states for the First Session by recalling the previous NSO meeting in which it was suggested to organise the First Session of OIC-StatCom. Dr. Alpay has also called for contributions from participants on the various points of the above agenda.

The speech of Mr. Mohanna Al-Mohanna, Director of CDSI Saudi Arabia was the last of the opening session. After words of welcome and appreciation to the organizers of the meeting (SESRIC and IDB), Mr. Al-Mohanna has focused on harmonisation of statistical systems of member states and their alignment with international standards, the elimination of differences noted between the NSOs and statistical practices. Mr. Mohanna noted that the NSOs of OIC Member Countries need more financial and human resources to respond emerging data demands and support their capacity building activities. He also expressed that OIC NSOs should cooperate closely to meet the challenges and bring about an effective collaboration environment.

Following these introductory messages, a Bureau that reflects geographical representations of the OIC has been elected for a period of two years. The Bureau is composed as follows:

- Chair: Saudi Arabia
- Vice Chairs: Indonesia and Sudan
- Rapporteur : Senegal

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OIC-StatCom: Expectations, Goals, and Operational Principles

During this session participants were asked to answer three questions:

- What are the expectations of member states from the OIC-StatCom?
- How can the OIC-StatCom respond to the needs expressed by member states?
- What organisational form for the OIC-StatCom?

Expectations of Member States

The expectations raised by the member states vis-à-vis the OIC-StatCom can be summarized as follows:

- Assess the situation in different member states to identify the specific needs of each country,
- Develop, based on the above evaluation, a strategic development plan: it was suggested that this strategic plan relies particularly on National Strategies for Development of Statistics (NSDS) developed by countries and especially covers areas not covered by other institutions,
- Developing cooperation among member countries and between them and international institutions,
- Harmonize standards and concepts used by member states and bring statistical agencies of countries at different economic, social and statistical degrees to a uniform level,
- Put more resources into technical assistance, especially to post-conflict OIC member states,
- Develop human resources of member states in both quantity and quality by continuous training,
- Develop the legal exercise of statistics in member states by assisting Governments to develop statistical laws,
- Establish democratic rules for the OIC-StatCom in order to have a good participation from all member countries,
- Develop advocacy towards the political authorities of member states for better allocation of human and financial resources to statistics,
- Develop a common web page for all member states,
- Make the OIC-StatCom a platform of debate and discussion on particular concepts that should be adapted to the realities of Islamic societies to better meet the high demand addressed to NSOs of member states,
- Focus on the establishment and strengthening of statistical capacity of member states and particularly on the management of knowledge through working groups to develop different areas of statistics,
- Ensure better statistical coordination of member states: PARIS21 committed to helping the OIC-StatCom in this area,
- Manage the initiatives of the UNSC,
- Develop statistical literacy in member states.

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How the NSOs of Member States can Make the OIC-StatCom to Deliver Their Expectations?

In this respect, the participants felt that the OIC-StatCom should be a platform for exchanging experiences and best practices, with high level representation reflecting the political will of the authorities of the member countries.

Furthermore, promoting the work of the Commission must be provided in the member countries. The Commission should also ensure the availability of financial resources in the long term.

It has been suggested that a roadmap integrating the expectations of member states be developed.

What Organisational Form for the OIC-StatCom?

On this question the following points were discussed:

- Accession to the OIC-StatCom
- The representation of international organisations and nongovernmental organisations
- The officers of the OIC-StatCom; i.e, the Bureau
- The secretariat of the OIC-StatCom and its responsibilities
- The areas of work of the OIC-StatCom
- Calendar of meetings, their frequency and location of meetings of the OIC-StatCom
- The working languages of the OIC-StatCom

Regarding membership, it was decided that the OIC member states are permanent members and the international organisations are observers. The selection of those international organisations which participate in meetings of the OIC-StatCom will be left to the discretion of the Chairman of the Commission. The responsibilities of the secretariat by SESRIC include managing a web page incorporating the database and issues related to statistical training and the various technical fields of Statistics.

The meetings of the OIC-StatCom will be on a yearly basis in April, after the session of the UNSC.

Regarding the venue of the OIC-StatCom sessions, it was suggested to convene in Istanbul while holding the sessions in other countries is also possible.

Proposals have been made for the introduction of other working languages different than the 3 official languages of the OIC (Arabic, English, and French). However, the official languages of the OIC have been adopted as the working languages of the Commission. The possibility of translating the meeting documents in other languages was suggested when there is significant representation from countries not speaking the official languages of the OIC.

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Effective Cooperation for Statistical Capacity Building

Two presentations were made by the NSOs of Malaysia and Bahrain. They have included:

- The strengthening of statistical capacity,
- Cooperation between the regional statistical training institutes,
- Strengthening financial capacities for conducting seminars, workshops, conferences, organizing study visits etc.,
- Establishing a pool of expertise in member states,
- Eliminating language barriers,
- Assessing the impact of training,
- The accreditation of professional skills to improve competency in statistics in OIC member countries. The accreditation program could use the process of peer review.

Dr. Abdullateef Bello of IDB also delivered a presentation on the IDB statistical capacity building program (STATCAP). A key element of this program is the transparency in the implementation stages of projects and their evaluation as well as the possibility of co-financing of projects for capacity building with other international organisations. This program supports conferences, study visits, scholarships for nationals of member states.

Mohamed-el-Heyba Lemrabott Berrou, Manager of PARIS21, stressed the various dimensions of capacity development, namely human resources, legal framework for the exercise of the statistical infrastructure in his statement. He also underlined the importance of training for leadership and to know all the support of technical and financial partners in capacity development in countries, to develop NSDS and do peer review under the South-South cooperation.

Mohammed El Qorchi of IMF mentioned about the importance of cooperation between different institutions involved in capacity development in his statement. Indeed, the IMF deals with 127 countries for technical assistance in macroeconomic statistics, while there is lack of information about what the other institutions do in this field.

Dr. Paul Cheung of UNSD has stressed in his statement the need for coordination of statistical capacity building activities that is not limited to training.

It was suggested to consider ICT as an important factor in the development of statistical capacity.

It was also proposed that the list of priority issues in the field of capacity building be developed.

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Enhancing Statistical Awareness and Outreach

This theme was addressed in the context of 4 groups formed for the break-out session held on 12 April 2011. Discussions focused on ways and means for making statistics more visible, more comprehensible and useful to all citizens.

It was noted that it is important to have a law in each country organizing the statistical activities, defining the components of the National Statistical System, duties and obligations of different actors (producers, users and data providers). These laws must take into account the fundamental principles of official statistics issued by the United Nations Statistical Commission.

It was also noted that internal communication within the NSOs may contribute to greater visibility.

It was emphasized that coordination of different actors (producers, users and data providers) is an important vehicle for increasing the visibility of statistical production that should take the user demand into account. The rise of statistical coordination at the level of political authorities and the training of them to a better understanding of statistics are important levers for the visibility of the statistics.

Statistical training should also involve other stakeholders such as unions and journalists who may constitute important links in wide dissemination of statistics. It was recognized that the introduction of statistical training in primary schools can contribute significantly to the development of statistical literacy. The use of information technology and communication is also a factor in developing the profile of statistics and user loyalty (website, social networks).

The NSOs should include communication specialists in their human resources for better dissemination of statistics. In this sense, the press releases can be very useful for users of statistics. A schedule for publications/broadcasts circulated in advance should help the visibility of the statistics to increase.

The scientific independence of the NSOs is also a factor of credibility and visibility of the statistics. It is the same for equal access of citizens to statistical information.

It was acknowledged that access to data by individual users may contribute to a better visibility of the statistics.

Concerted Efforts, New Prospects and Future Challenges in Statistics

Mr. Haidar Fraihat, Director General of DOS Jordan, presented the results of Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Islamic Statistics. The importance attached to these statistics is the weight of the Muslim community which represents 20% of world population. The results of the EGM focused on two areas: statistical data on Muslims and

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those on the behaviours of them. In the EGM, it was articulated that statistics can be collected in various areas, including the zakat, Islamic banks, charities, heritage, marriages, divorces, the number of orphans, Muslim schools, pilgrimage to Mecca, poverty, Quranic centres, mosques, migrations, wars and natural disasters. The Panel is working on a framework for compiling the statistics that every member country of OIC can adapt according to its specificities. Some countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran have experience in this field that can be shared with other member countries. Similarly, the IDB has such information on its website.

In conclusion, it was proposed that a working group be established to handle matters pointed out at the EGM.

A presentation on the OIC Statistical Working Group (SWG) has been delivered by Dr. Abdullateef Bello of IDB. He mentioned about the activities carried out during two meetings in 2008 and 2009 and the difficulties encountered in implementing the ten-year action plan of the OIC and in particular the differences in the figures produced for the same indicator by various OIC institutions.

The final presentation was delivered by Mr. Pieter Everaers of Eurostat. His presentation focused on the legal link between Eurostat and statistical offices of EU member states, developments in measuring progress of societies, the impact of financial crisis on statistical priorities, the work of Eurostat and dissemination. It was noted in the presentation that improving communication in statistics is important in prevention of crises.

Closing Session

The Members of the OIC Statistical Commission (OIC-StatCom) took the following decisions at its First Session in Istanbul, Turkey on 12 April 2011:

1. The Members of the OIC-StatCom elected the following Members of the Bureau:
 - Chair: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
 - Vice Chairs: Indonesia and Sudan
 - Rapporteur: Senegal
2. The members of the OIC-StatCom identified their expectations from the Commission and elaborated on the future directions of the OIC-StatCom.
3. The OIC-StatCom endorsed the rules of procedures of the OIC-StatCom as attached to this document.
4. The OIC-StatCom decided to establish a working group on the statistical indicators specific to OIC member states, which will develop common standards and methodologies for these indicators and report the outcomes to the next session of the Commission. Jordan agreed on the chairmanship of this Working Group.

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5. The OIC-StatCom decided to establish a working group to develop a strategic vision for the OIC-StatCom towards more effective statistical systems and elaborate short, medium and long term plans to achieve this Vision. Indonesia agreed on the chairmanship of this Working Group.
6. The OIC-StatCom decided to establish a working group to develop an accreditation program for statisticians. Bahrain agreed on the chairmanship of this Working Group.
7. The OIC-StatCom mandated the Secretariat of the Commission to develop and maintain the OIC-StatCom Website with comprehensive statistical information on OIC member states.
8. The OIC-StatCom called on all members to actively participate in the undertakings of all working groups.
9. The OIC-StatCom decided to have their next Session in Istanbul in April 2012.

The meeting ended with the adoption of the Rules of procedure of the OIC-StatCom and the final communiqué as in appendix.

Mamadou Falou MBENGUE

The Rapporteur of OIC-StatCom