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**REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE MONITORING
OF PROGRESS TOWARDS THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS***

* This report was prepared by Argentina, coordinator of the Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, in collaboration with the Statistics and Economic Projections Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

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A. GENERAL AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Since its inception, the general aim of the Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals has been to understand and reduce the discrepancies between the data produced by the countries and those used by international bodies in monitoring the Millennium Development Goals, by broadening and improving the quality of statistical data in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and promoting inter-institutional coordination both within countries and among the countries and international agencies.

The following specific objectives for the working group for the period 2009-2011 were approved by the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) at its fifth meeting:

1. Improve coordination between ECLAC and the coordinator of the Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, with a view to strengthening the role of national statistical offices in implementing the programme of work for the new biennium.
2. Contribute to building up national coordination mechanisms for the production of statistics for the Millennium Development Goals and for proper reporting on the Goals in national reports. This will be carried out with the collaboration of statistical offices, the rapporteurs responsible for national reports and the corresponding sector ministers.
3. Analyse and propose indicators that will enable the Latin American and Caribbean countries to evaluate progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals at the subnational level in line with the priorities and conditions established in each country.
4. Promote the development and implementation of the regional statistical reconciliation strategy for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals in order to facilitate inter-agency coordination and the harmonization of statistics within the countries and among the countries and the international agencies.
5. Identify and channel financial resources to contribute to further building and improvement of the countries' statistical capacities to produce indicators showing progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and to promote their use in the corresponding reports and by other users.
6. Promote and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences regarding the production and use of statistics for the Millennium Development Goals among the countries of the region, based on the inter-agency network of producers and users of indicators for the Millennium Development Goals in the region.
7. Urge international agencies to improve the coverage and transparency of methodologies employed to calculate the values of indicators for the Millennium Development Goals and to avoid the use of imputed figures unless consultations with the respective countries have yielded specific national data to support them reliably.

B. PROGRESS TO DATE

During the biennium 2009-2011, the Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals has made significant progress on several of its objectives, completing a large proportion of the activities that it had planned for the period. However, further efforts are needed in some areas and certain challenges have been identified for inclusion among the objectives and activities for the next biennium.

The positive outcomes have been possible thanks to the work of Argentina in its role as coordinator of the Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, improved coordination between Argentina and the technical secretariat, and the high level of commitment that countries have demonstrated by participating in and financing attendance at the meetings of the working group. The first objective for the period on improving coordination between ECLAC and Argentina as the coordinator of the working group has thus been met fully.

As a result of this proper coordination, it was possible to hold two meetings of the working group in Buenos Aires, organized by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses of Argentina, with the support of ECLAC.

The first meeting of countries of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC on monitoring the Millennium Development Goals was held from 28 to 30 September 2009 with financial support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The aims of the meeting were to evaluate the activities carried out during the present biennium, adjust the group's approach and define new objectives for the next biennium.

The aims of the second meeting of countries of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC on monitoring the Millennium Development Goals, held on 14 and 15 July 2011, were as follows: (i) evaluate the activities carried out during the biennium; (ii) adjust the group's approach and define new objectives for the next biennium; (iii) reach an agreement on the content of the report on activities of the current biennium; and (iv) review the recommendations of the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas on improving the operating modalities of the working groups. At the meeting, progress was made on proposing activities for the biennium 2012-2013 and on discussing the challenges and priorities in relation to the Millennium Development Goals, both at the national and regional levels. An agreement was reached on the main points to consider in the work programme for the next biennium, which will be submitted for approval by the Statistical Conference of the Americas at its sixth meeting.

Another factor that has enabled the working group to make steady progress towards its goals is the statistical programme relating to the Millennium Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean, which has been working for several years on action lines that intersect with the objectives of the working group. As a result, a regional knowledge base has been built up and there are additional financial resources available, which, although limited, have made it easier to carry out studies and hold meetings in the region.

1. Reducing statistical discrepancies

As mentioned above, one of the main objectives of the group is to reduce discrepancies between the values reported by different national and international sources for the Millennium Development Goals indicators, and to improve the availability of information by fostering inter-agency coordination and helping to strengthen countries' statistical capacity.

With a view to meeting specific objectives 2 and 4 for the biennium 2009-2011, the working group has developed various activities to strengthen the statistical and institutional capacities of official statistical and other sectoral bodies. These activities have been carried out in collaboration with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and have involved national statistical offices, some sectoral bodies and rapporteurs responsible for national reports.

(i) *Evaluating the differences*

One of the main tasks that ECLAC has taken on is to help countries reconcile statistical gaps and discrepancies in relation to the Millennium Development Goals. To that end it has conducted a broad evaluation of the differences in data availability and the discrepancies between the values reported by national and international sources. Several documents have resulted from this process, with a view to making progress towards the development of regional statistical reconciliation strategies and mechanisms for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean:

- Azócar, Irene, Rayén Quiroga and Pauline Stockins (2010), “Vacíos y discrepancias estadísticas en los indicadores ODM: hacia una estrategia regional de conciliación estadística para América Latina y el Caribe”, *Estudios estadísticos y prospectivos series*, No. 70 (LC/L.3176-P), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). United Nations publication, Sales No. S.10.II.G.150.
- Stockins, P. and D. Taccari (2009), “Tipologías de discrepancias y medidas de conciliación estadística de los indicadores ODM según áreas temáticas seleccionadas: marco general”, paper presented at the annual seminar on advances and challenges in relation to statistical reconciliation for monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Buenos Aires, 5-6 November 2009.
- Bay, Guiomar (2009), “Algunas consideraciones respecto de las tipologías de discrepancias y medidas de conciliación estadística para los indicadores de mortalidad en la niñez de los ODM”, paper presented at the annual seminar on advances and challenges in relation to statistical reconciliation for monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Buenos Aires, 5-6 November 2009.
- Taccari, Daniel (2009), “Tipologías de discrepancias y medidas de conciliación estadística de los indicadores ODM según áreas temáticas seleccionadas: educación”, paper presented at the annual seminar on advances and challenges in relation to statistical reconciliation for monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Buenos Aires, 5-6 November 2009.

2. Promoting inter-agency coordination and strengthening statistical capacities

(i) Organization of regional meetings on the Millennium Development Goals

In order to help strengthen national coordination mechanisms for the production of statistics relating to the Millennium Development Goals and ensure sufficient coverage of the Goals in national reports, ECLAC has been holding regional meetings on an annual basis with the aim of enhancing inter-agency coordination within countries and among countries and international bodies, thus contributing towards objectives 2, 6 and 7 for the period 2009-2011.

The annual seminar on advances and challenges in relation to statistical reconciliation for monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, organized by the Statistics and Economic Projections Division of ECLAC with the support of the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses of Argentina, was held in Buenos Aires on 5 and 6 November 2009. This seminar served as a follow-up to the annual meetings held on this topic and as a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas on cross-cutting issues relating to the Goals, strengthening national capacities for statistical production and enhancing inter-agency coordination within countries and among countries and international bodies. The participants included high-level representatives of the national statistical offices and of the national agencies responsible for preparing national reports on the Millennium Development Goals as well as representatives of regional agencies responsible for calculating and monitoring indicators of the Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean.

From 31 January to 3 February 2011, a workshop on monitoring the progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals was held in San José, organized by the United Nations Statistics Division with the support of ECLAC, the National Institute of Statistics and Census of Costa Rica and the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy of Costa Rica. Although this event had a predominantly Central American focus, it is worth mentioning as its approach was extremely successful in bringing together producers of information from the countries involved and specialists from the international agencies responsible for developing the Millennium Development Goal indicators at the global level. The representatives of the national statistical offices and ministries were divided into groups with the representatives of the international bodies to discuss the discrepancies between national and international data. Representatives of seven countries (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Panama and Paraguay) and seven international agencies (World Bank, ECLAC, United Nations Statistics Division, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Labour Organization and Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)) attended the meeting.

(ii) Participation in thematic regional meetings

Another action line that had been put forward for the biennium 2009-2011 with a view to using the scarce financial resources available more efficiently and which has proved very useful for moving towards statistical reconciliation in given areas covered by the Millennium Development Goals was the organization of special sessions during regional meetings on specific thematic areas to discuss Millennium Development Goal indicators.

This thematic approach to the different dimensions of the Millennium Development Goals takes advantage of the attendance of producers and users of statistics relating to each issue to be dealt with. The three meetings included in the plan of activities were:

- Meeting of Directors of Statistics. Practices for improving the quality of mortality data and harmonization of Millennium Development Goal indicators 4 and 5: two discussion forums. Organized by PAHO and ECLAC. Lima, 27-29 April 2010.
- The sixth Workshop on Measuring the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized by the Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC), with support from the International Development Research Centre. Montevideo, 21-23 September 2010.
- The eleventh international meeting on gender statistics and public policies based on empirical evidence. Aguascalientes, Mexico, 28-30 September 2010.

By participating in these meetings, the working group completed all of its planned activities for the biennium.

The Meeting of Directors of Statistics was considered a valuable opportunity to evaluate discrepancies between the official data of each country and those prepared by regional bodies. A programme of work has yet to be drawn up with PAHO, the World Health Organization and UNICEF, the regional and international bodies responsible for the health elements of the Millennium Development Goals, to establish a way of analysing in detail the methodology used to calculate these indicators.

The Workshop on Measuring the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean was organized by OSILAC of the Division of Production, Productivity and Management of ECLAC. In the special session on the Millennium Development Goals, the participants discussed the proposal of ECLAC to develop a set of complementary indicators on access to information and communication technologies.

Lastly, the report on the international meeting on gender statistics contained some valuable conclusions. The working group met its objective in this regard, even though it was not possible for it to hold a special session on monitoring the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals at this meeting because of a lack of coordination between the organizers. In the light of this situation, the group's activities for the next biennium should be planned to a greater level of detail.

The activities described above made it possible to move towards meeting objective 5 for the period.

3. Reducing the geographical scale of monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals

One of the specific objectives of the working group for the period 2009-2011 was to analyse and propose indicators that would enable the Latin American and Caribbean countries to evaluate progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals at the subnational level in line with the priorities and conditions established in each country.

There is a growing demand for tools to measure the progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals at the subnational level, as has been made evident at all of the working group's meetings; however, incipient development in this area makes it difficult to propose common indicators on a regional, departmental or state scale, for example.

Therefore, the Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals has returned to its original objective, opting first to analyse experiences and good practices in relation to the drafting of national reports on the Millennium Development Goals at the subnational level, placing particular emphasis on identifying obstacles to the production of those reports. To this end, the working group organized special sessions on monitoring Millennium Development Goals at the subnational level at regional meetings.

Furthermore, there are plans to draft a document identifying the countries of the region that produce this type of report at present.

C. CURRENT WORK

In the remainder of 2011, the working group will re-examine its objectives and prepare a programme of activities for the next biennium to present at the sixth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC.

Setting up an online forum for virtual interaction is key to increasing countries' involvement and harmonizing their participation, while at the same time making that participation more efficient. This action is intended to help meet objective 6 for this biennium: promote and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences regarding the production and use of statistics for the Millennium Development Goals among the countries of the region, based on the inter-agency network of producers and users of indicators for the Millennium Development Goals in the region. Such a forum would also fulfil the recommendation of the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas on improving the operating modalities of the working groups, namely to increasingly incorporate information and communications technologies in their operations and communications.

ECLAC will organize the annual seminar on progress and challenges in relation to statistical reconciliation for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals in the countries of Latin America, to be held in Mexico City on 1 and 2 December 2011, in order to continue helping to build up national coordination mechanisms for the production of statistics for the Millennium Development Goals. Representatives of the United Nations Statistics Division, international agencies, national statistical offices and national agencies responsible for producing national reports on the Millennium Development Goals are expected to attend.

D. OBJECTIVES FOR 2012-2013

For the coming period, the Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals reaffirms its general objectives with regard to reducing statistical discrepancies, improving the production of official statistics on the Millennium Development Goals using international standards and regional points of reference, and promoting inter-agency coordination and the harmonization of statistics relating to the Millennium Development Goals. The working group is therefore redoubling its efforts to consolidate and enhance statistical capacities for the production of indicators for the Goals, promoting a programme of work to support the activities carried out at the national level and to deepen the inter-institutional coordination processes within countries, as well as among countries and international agencies.

ECLAC reaffirms its commitment to supporting national statistical production and statistical reconciliation, as well as its resolve to continue contributing to analytical studies on the status of each of the Millennium Development Goals indicators in the region, with a view to fostering more effective regional cooperation. It will fulfil that commitment through an interregional project entitled “Strengthening statistical and inter-institutional capacities for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals through interregional cooperation and knowledge-sharing”, funded by the United Nations Development Account.

The Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals therefore presents the following specific objectives and activities for the period 2012-2013 for the consideration and approval of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC:

1. Continue promoting the development of official statistics for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals at the regional, national and subnational levels.
2. Continue developing actions aimed at statistical reconciliation by identifying and analysing discrepancies between national data and the data available at the international level, as well as by building up national coordination mechanisms for the production of statistics for the Millennium Development Goals and for proper reporting on the Goals in national reports.

In line with the recommendations of the Conference regarding the operating modalities of the working group, the following objectives are also proposed for the biennium:

3. Improve communication between the member countries of the working group by incorporating the use of information and communications technologies into its operations, recognizing that holding online meetings and workshops will help the group to meet its objectives.
4. Promote and facilitate training activities on the production and use of statistics relating to the Millennium Development Goals among producers and users of statistics in the different countries of the region, making use of the Knowledge Transfer Network.
5. Identify and channel financial resources to contribute to the further building and improvement of countries’ statistical capacities to produce indicators showing progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and to promote their use in the corresponding reports and by other users.

E. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR 2012-2013

In order to fulfil the objectives indicated above, the Working Group on the Monitoring of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals plans to carry out the following activities:

1. General planning and management activities

(a) Working group meetings

- Face-to-face meetings to evaluate the activities carried out during the current biennium and to adjust the activities and timeline proposed for outstanding tasks, as well as to propose some initial action lines for the biennium 2014-2015.
- Administration and maintenance of the content on the collaborative website, with a view to maintaining fluid communication between the different members of the group and organizing online meetings and technical debates (see activities related to objective 4).

2. Activities related to objective 1 (statistical development)

(a) Manage and coordinate participation in thematic meetings organized by other regional agencies addressing the different dimensions of the Millennium Development Goals, with a view to discussing and analysing the progress made and challenges remaining in relation to Millennium Development Goal indicators in the respective sectoral areas. To that end, there are plans to:

- Address the specific details of the indicators with the national experts and international agencies responsible for the production of the indicators in some of the fields covered by the Millennium Development Goals.
- Create synergies between the institutional authorities in the region in order to make efficient use of available resources.
- Provide follow-up to the meetings held during the previous biennium.

(b) Organize a regional workshop on strengthening statistical capacities in relation to the Millennium Development Goal indicators for experts from national statistical offices and other producers of data at the national level, with a view to addressing the technical aspects and methodological content of these indicators. With the participation of experts from international agencies, the workshop will:

- Address technical issues from specific fields covered by the Millennium Development Goals.
- Ensure full transparency in the adjustments and calculation methods used by the international agencies for producing indicators for monitoring progress on the Millennium Development Goals at the international level.

(c) To the extent possible within the limitations of the project that ECLAC is implementing, some technical assistance missions are expected to be carried out focusing on strengthening the capacities of the national technical teams responsible for producing and monitoring Millennium Development Goal indicators. The strategy adopted will depend on demand and the particular challenges relating to certain objectives, as well as the budget available for the project. Horizontal cooperation missions will also be organized in response to specific requests, in order to enable countries in the region to benefit from other countries' high standards of statistical development.

(d) Broaden the range of complementary Millennium Development Goal indicators that reflect the regional situation in selected areas: hunger, employment and health.

- (e) Promote the production of indicators that will enable Latin American and Caribbean countries to evaluate progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals at the subnational level, in line with the priorities and conditions established in each country. To that end a data sheet could be prepared for each country, listing the statistical operations in use, in order to catalogue all the sources available for the production of Millennium Development Goal indicators at the subnational level. Data from the 2010 round of censuses, among other sources of information, should be taken into account. The coordinator of the working group would be responsible for analysing the data sheets and compiling a report, with the support of other member countries of the group and the technical secretariat.

3. Activities related to objective 2 (statistical reconciliation)

- (a) Hold at least one regional seminar on the Millennium Development Goals (organized by ECLAC with the support of the coordinator of the working group), bringing together the directors of the national statistical offices in the region, the national rapporteurs responsible for reporting on the Millennium Development Goals and the international agencies, with the following aims:
- Exchange ideas among the producers and users of statistics for monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.
 - Create forums for discussion on the production and regional harmonization of Millennium Development Goal indicators.
 - Define strategies to continue with the regional statistical reconciliation processes.
 - Promote the active and sustained participation of national statistical offices in monitoring and reporting on the Millennium Development Goals.
 - Promote the use of complementary indicators to analyse the situation of the countries within the regional context.
- (b) Move towards addressing statistical discrepancies at the conferences, meetings and workshops to be held during the biennium, by taking the following steps:
- Discuss statistical reconciliation measures with national authorities and international or regional agencies specializing in poverty, health, environment, education, gender or other issues in order to move towards the harmonization of statistics on the Millennium Development Goals at the national, regional and international levels.
 - Raise awareness of the measures that international and regional agencies have been adopting to make the information they use on the Millennium Development Goals and their imputation methods more transparent.
 - Foster the strengthening of the inter-institutional coordination mechanisms through the active participation of all actors involved in the statistical processes related to the indicators and national reports on the Millennium Development Goals.
- (c) Systematize the information flows among the different national and international agencies regarding the Millennium Development Goal indicators to better understand the origin of the statistics used at the international level and thus move towards statistical reconciliation. The compilation of this information could take the form of a data sheet for each country, which would then be sent to the coordinator of the working group for analysis and to be used as the basis for a report.

4. Activities related to specific objective 3 (training)

- (a) Coordinate closely with the Knowledge Transfer Network to carry out training activities (subject to availability of funding) on statistical themes relating to the Millennium Development Goals, both general and specific, with a view to strengthening the technical capacities of the national statistical offices and the respective national sectoral bodies in relation to preparing the national report.

5. Activities related to specific objective 4 (regional network)

- (a) Set up a collaborative website to facilitate communication among the members of the working group and to host virtual meetings and workshops. To bring this proposal to fruition, the coordinator of the working group, in collaboration with the technical secretariat, will develop and administer an online forum to enable online discussions and exchanges of opinions.
 - Remote meetings to coordinate the activities defined for the next biennium.
 - Organization of technical debates to improve collaboration and joint efforts among national statistical offices with the aim of enhancing their participation in preparing national reports on the Millennium Development Goals.

6. Activities related to specific objective 5 (financing)

- (a) Consult with countries, through the forum, to formulate fund-raising strategies and to prepare projects to finance the face-to-face meetings and activities relating to statistical aspects of the Millennium Development Goals.
- (b) Identify possible sources of resources and donors.
- (c) Manage projects with donors.