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REFERENCE DOCUMENT

DDR/1

1 February 2002

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECLAC

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

First meeting of the Executive Committee of the
Statistical Conference of the Americas of the
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 25-26 March 2002

**STATISTICAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS
MODUS OPERANDI**

This document was prepared by Sergio Besserman Vianna, President of the Brazilian Geographical and Statistical Institute (IBGE) in his capacity as Chairperson of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

02-1-65

The establishment of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the election of its first Chairperson in May 2001, opened up a promising arena for debate for national statistical offices (NSO).

The Statistical Conference of the Americas was created as a subsidiary body of ECLAC, and its aim is to contribute to the improvement of policies and statistical activities of the countries of the region. As such, it should be an institution that promotes cooperation among the NSOs of the region and among other statistical offices of ECLAC and institutions of the United Nations system.

The purpose of this document is to propose mechanisms for the functioning of the Conference. This is necessary in order to promote a common understanding among the member countries of the potential opportunities produced by this instrument and to make it a useful and influential body for the exchange of ideas and experiences.

Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/7, created the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC and defined its general purpose:

- Promote the development and improvement of national statistics and their international comparability, while bearing in mind the recommendations of the United Nations Statistical Commission, specialized agencies and other pertinent organizations;
- Promote international, regional and bilateral cooperation among the NSOs and international and regional agencies; and
- Prepare a biannual programme of international and regional cooperation activities which, provided that resources are available, will fulfil the needs of the countries of the region.

In the following sections of this paper concern three questions that should be considered when discussing the modus operandi of the Conference in order that its goals can be successfully reached.

(1) The first point to be considered is that the agenda for the Conference should address questions relevant to the NSO. The identification of the questions to be debated at the Conference should follow a routine, agreed in advance among the countries.

The steps to be observed in the organization of the debates should be as follows:

- Identification of the topics;
- Choice of the topics for discussion;
- Exhaustive discussion of the topics;
- Recommendation of actions;
- Adoption of resolutions; and
- Evaluation of the results of the implemented resolutions.

- The identification and choice of the topics to debate

The Executive Committee, that assists the Chairperson of the Conference, is the first group to be heard in order to propose a list of relevant topics to be considered for in-depth discussion at the Conference. The topics, once identified, should be submitted for discussion in the first meeting of the Committee. The main function of the Committee is thus to choose the topics that will be discussed in depth at the Conference.

After the first meeting of the Committee, informal consultations should be held among the members countries in order to identify which countries will be in charge of the preparation of the documents to be formally presented for discussion at the Conference. This process of consultation should not exclude the contribution of countries that, without making a commitment to presenting substantive documents to the Conference, may submit a paper to support the debate.

The second meeting of the Committee should define the final agenda of the Conference and specify the contributions of the member countries at the Conference.

- Substantive discussion and recommendation of actions

The documents for debate at the Conference should be oriented to raising questions, that is to say, the documents should make proposals to organize the debate. The results of the debate should promote a better understanding of the topic discussed. In a successful discussion process, elements should be obtained for the elaboration of a consensus document that represents the view of the member countries. If this is the case, the conclusions could be presented at other forums of debate, such as the United Nations Statistical Commission. The result of the debate should, at least, clarify the topic for all members of the Conference.

In short, the debate of the substantive topics at the Conference should raise the level of shared understanding about the subjects discussed. The solutions reached at the debate should lead to actions that will strength the NSOs and their relation with other institutions, in their own country and with international organizations.

(2) Besides discussing relevant topics and proposing actions, the Conference is also a forum for the countries to present their own experiences in fields that should be of interest to other member countries. In this case, the suggestion is that the Conference should reserve a space for the presentation of such experiences, which should emphasize analytical aspects of the problem and lessons learned.

(3) The evaluation of the work programme of the Conference, previously defined by the member countries, is one of the responsibilities of the Conference. ECLAC is responsible for complying with the tasks assigned to it by the Conference. In this sense, the contribution of the countries in the elaboration of the programme should be quite substantial. The general orientation of this programme should be as follows:

- To strengthen national statistical capabilities;
- To enhance the prestige of statistical activities in the countries;
- Strengthen the role of the NSOs as the main coordinators of the national statistical system;
- To increase and improve the amount of statistical information supplied;
- To respond to the demands of the users; and
- To start new work programmes in relation to emerging issues.

This document identifies the main steps to be observed in order to prepare for the Conference. The chief target to be achieved by the Conference, as stated by the Economic and Social Council resolution, is to improve the functioning of NSOs in Latin America. The strategy for operating the Conference can be summarized as follows:

- The Executive Committee, at two meetings, identifies and selects the topics and country experiences to be presented at the Conference and organizes the contributions of the countries;
- The Conference debates in depth the selected topics, thereby contributing to the enhancement of the member countries' pool of knowledge concerning relevant issues;
- The discussion of the selected topics should lead to actions and, when possible, generate proposals to be presented by ECLAC to the United Nations Statistical Commission and other forums;
- ECLAC presents and debates, with the contribution of all member countries, the work programme of the Conference.

Statistical Conference of the Americas: a synthetic presentation

Discussions	Actions
- Presentation of country experiences	- Work programme of the Conference
- Debate of substantive topics	- Recommendations drawn from the discussions on the substantive topics