

First meeting of the 2009/2010 Bureau  
Washington, D.C., 15-16 October 2009

Item 10a of the Provisional  
Agenda

## **SOME THOUGHTS ON FURTHER ENHANCEMENTS TO THE CES SEMINARS**

**Note prepared by Statistics Canada\***

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The CES seminars are extremely useful and help countries learn of best practices on topics of considerable interest.
2. Having participated in these seminars over two years, I am of the view that there are opportunities to enhance their usefulness further.
3. In order to present some thoughts in this context, I break down the seminars into their three components:
  - seminar topics;
  - seminar format;
  - seminar follow-up.
4. The following reviews all three topics with some suggestions. But before attempting that, it is useful to describe the underlying considerations for the proposal.

### **II. OBJECTIVE**

5. The objective of the current structure of the seminars is to share best practices on issues of current importance.
6. I do not suggest changing the objective. Rather, the purpose is to suggest changes that would make the achievement of this objective more certain, both in learning about relevant best practices and in implementing them.

### **III. CHOICE OF TOPICS**

7. The current system establishes, for next year, two topics at the CES plenary session in June of a year. This is done by the CES Bureau, informing the CES participants, based on the electronic polling of participants.

---

\* This paper has benefited from a discussion of these issues with Heli Jeskanen-Sundström and Lidia Bratanova. It includes a number of the suggestions they offered that have substantially improved the structure of the proposals.

8. This is appropriate as the topics in most demand are selected.
9. Where improvements are feasible is in the area of focus on particular/precise issues that should be covered, within general/broad topics, to be of interest to a large number of countries.
10. One risk of the current laissez-faire approach is that the focus of papers may be on narrow/technical issues, not of great importance in a strategic sense for the Chief Statisticians.
11. Another risk is that the large number of sub-issues covered (within a broad topic) in a wide range of submissions may not allow justice done to any of the subjects.
12. A corollary of these outcomes is that the interventions from the floor may be less useful than desired.

### ***Proposal***

- (a) I propose that the Bureau, following the determination of the two topics for next year, should undertake thorough deliberations about the precise detailed sub-topics it would want examined within the broad topics (possibly at the October meeting, to be conveyed to seminar organizers immediately after).
- (b) There are two possible approaches one may follow: first, to assign one precise sub-topic to only one country and the number of sub-topics is equal to the number of presenting countries; second, each presenting country is asked to comment on all the sub-topics. My preference would be for the later approach.
- (c) It would also be desirable to ask invited authors for an explicit/short list of best practices on the issues they analyze.
- (d) The number of sessions on each topic would be restricted to either 2 or 3, to allow a more fulsome discussion of a smaller range of important issues, including greater participation from the floor.
- (e) An example differentiating the proposal from the current system could be helpful. Take, as an example, the issue of the current global financial crisis. If a seminar is held on this topic and papers are invited, they could be discussing, say 10-15 unique aspects of this issue. In contrast, under this proposal, the Bureau, in addition to deciding on the main topic (i.e. global financial crises) would also suggest 4-5 key questions such as: does the crisis suggest the need for new data; do NSOs have to improve timeliness; is there a need for improved communication; is there increased role for international organizations; is there a need for improved dialogue between NSOs and regulators. Invited Papers would each deal with the same set of questions.
- (f) The seminar organizers could invite a limited number of sub-topics beyond those suggested by the Bureau, within the constraints described above.

#### **IV. SEMINAR FORMAT**

13. Under the current format, a discussant takes up the majority of time in summarizing the papers.
14. Its benefit seems to be to focus on contents of submitted papers that are of most general nature. Furthermore, it is expected that it avoids lengthy presentations by authors.
15. Its drawback is that the only perspective one gets on the issue is that of the discussant. Any issues of less importance to a discussant may be ignored.
16. We should try to find a mechanism where we avoid the weakness of each system and focus on their strengths.

#### ***Proposal***

17. I propose we try two changes:
  - (a) to replace the current format with a panel discussion;
  - (b) to give more time to interventions from the floor.
18. The panel could work as follows:
  - (a) it is composed of invited authors;
  - (b) it is guided by a chair;
  - (c) the chair poses a set of questions for the panel, based largely on precise questions proposed by the Bureau;
  - (d) panel members have a reasonable time to respond, followed by a discussion among the panel members;
  - (e) the chair asks the floor to have their say; and
  - (f) a rapporteur finally draws conclusions as a list of best practices. It is suggested that the same rapporteur should cover all sessions of a seminar. There would thus be 2 rapporteurs for the two seminars.

#### **V. FOLLOW-UP**

19. It is my view that follow-up is important both as a check on whether participants have found the seminar to be useful and on the relevance of the topics.

#### ***Proposal***

- (a) It is proposed that the Secretariat invite countries to submit information on any follow-ups to the rapporteur.

- (b) That the rapporteur summarizes this follow-up at the beginning of next year's seminar using a small amount of time. The follow-up may happen only once at the next year's seminar (my preference) or could happen over more than one year, if others so wish.

\* \* \* \* \*