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CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

UNECE Work Session on Statistical Dissemination and Communication
(Geneva, 13-15 May 2008)

REPORT

1. The UNECE Work Session on Statistical Dissemination and Communication was held from 13 to 15 May 2008 in Geneva, Switzerland. It was attended by participants from: Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and United States of America. The Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Health Organization (WHO), and UNICEF were also represented. Experts from Gapminder and Swivel participated at the invitation of the Secretariat.

2. Mr. Heinrich Brünger, Director, UNECE Statistical Division addressed the meeting at the opening session. He stressed the rapid development of statistical dissemination and communication, driven by technology, user needs and requirements to measure increasingly complex socio-economic phenomena. He outlined the objective of the work session, to exchange experiences, but also to produce guidelines and good practices. He also mentioned the need for a balance between user demands and confidentiality protection, stressing the need for a clear policy and mechanism to manage data releases.

3. The delegates adopted the following agenda of the work session:

- (i) Communicating statistics in the information age;
- (ii) Building and maintaining relationships;
- (iii) Ethics and independence;
- (iv) Managing communication and dissemination.

4. Mr. Leon Ostergaard (Denmark) chaired the meeting. The following participants acted as session organizers: Mr. Gunter Schaefer (Eurostat) and Mr. Michael Levi (United States) for topic (i), Mr. Eric St John and Ms. Martine Grenier (Canada) for topic (ii), Mr. David Marder (United Kingdom) for topic (iii) and Ms. Colleen Flannery and Mr. Kenneth C. Meyer (United States) for topic (iv).

FURTHER INFORMATION

5. Presentations and all background documents for the meeting are available on the website of the UNECE Statistical Division (<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2008.05.dissemination.htm>).

I. COMMUNICATING STATISTICS IN THE INFORMATION AGE

Documentation: Keynote presentation by Mr. Hans Rosling (Gapminder); guest presentation by Sara Wood (Swivel); invited papers by Denmark, United States, and Eurostat; and supporting papers by OECD, United States, and the Russian Federation.

Session organizers: Mr. Gunter Schaefer (Eurostat) and Mr. Michael Levi (United States).

6. The Internet has changed the way statistical offices disseminate their products and communicate with customers. This topic will explore the impact new technologies are having on communication methods, from a strategic perspective rather than a technical one.

7. This topic provided an opportunity to examine the growing share of electronic publication in the mix between print and electronic and the emergence of tools that allow users to interact with data. The group considered the effectiveness of data visualization (DV) tools, Web 2.0 and other interactive mediums for engaging with users and improving statistical literacy, and also the role of metadata in facilitating communication.

8. Professor Hans Rosling made a keynote presentation that focused on impact of changes in society and technology on dissemination and communication of official statistics. The keynote presentation raised a number of issues:

- The Internet opens a window for direct communication between statistical offices and the public. This is an important addition to the traditional channels targeting governments, media and business community.
- Statistics need to be better presented, in particular in the environment of globalisation and convergence. The world generates data, which then needs to be brought and explained to users. This results in a change of focus from dissemination to communication, but there remains a need for both.
- The most important task for statistical offices is to make data more accessible by providing it directly to end-users or through intermediaries developing advanced visualization tools.
- There are a number of licensing issues to resolve. These include standardising references to the original source, protection of the original data, conditions for re-use and re-distribution of data.
- Users need easy access to data and more time for analysis. Trendalyzer, developed by non-profit organization Gapminder, aims to “broaden the bandwidth of the optic nerve” by showing large data sets through intuitive graphics.
- Participants considered whether innovative presentations of statistics promoted by Mr. Rosling influence the public. It seems that reception from the public has been highly positive. However, there is still a need to overcome traditional thinking in the professional community, and convince them of the value of innovative methods for presenting statistics.

9. Ms. Sara Wood was a guest speaker. Her presentation addressed the creation of communities around data on the Internet, and more particularly how these communities relate to the communication of statistics. The following points were raised in her presentation:

- The introduction of Internet is not the first technological change in dissemination and communication. Humanity went through such changes for centuries, for example switching from hand made to printed books and with the development of print technologies. In all these cases there were cultural issues to overcome. However, the change seems to be somehow faster in the Internet age.
- The Internet is not only a new media, but it also brings with new ways for communication and searching for information, for example search engines, blogs, wikis, discussions, etc.
- Swivel has an ambition to create an Internet community around statistical data. It created increased interest by allowing comments on data and communication between users and providers. There are also some lessons learned from the first release of Swivel. For example, the automatic creation of graphs has not worked well. The presentation has to be adjusted to the socio-economic phenomena and nature of data. Data that are published should be maintained and updated.

- The data formats influence how users can use the data. By offering several formats for the same data sets, the users can make a choice according to their need.
- The percentage of “very active” members in the Swivel community is around 1%. This corresponds to other Internet communities.
- Swivel offers a service to business users. The business clients include a very diverse group coming from small and large businesses.

10. A panel discussion “**How will access to official statistics look in 2020?**” was organized as part of this topic. The panel discussion was moderated by Mr. Günter Schaeffer (Eurostat). Mr. Hans Rosling (Gapminder), Ms. Sara Wood (Swivel), Mr. Petteri Baer (UNECE), Ms. Frances Comerford (Ireland) and Mr. Armin Gossenbacher (Switzerland) were members of the panel. The following points were made during the panel discussion:

- Twelve years may be too short for a revolutionary change in access to official statistics. However, the changes cannot be easily predicted.
- New data demanded relate to trans-boundary phenomena like environment, pollution, economic globalization, etc. We may see more such data before 2020.
- With a changing user community, and technology leading to less face-to-face contact with respondents, statistical offices have to pay more attention to managing customer relationships. This requires adequate customer relationship management systems.
- Metadata are important for explaining the information behind statistics to users. They should therefore be provided in a clear way together with data. Moreover, original metadata should be always attached when data are re-distributed.
- The “semantic web” opens new possibilities, but it is not only a technical issue. It is important to facilitate easy access to official statistics through portals, unified databases, and by other means offered by Internet technology.
- Establishing and maintaining credibility should be a focus. Present web sites comprise numerous outdated pages and old data. While these are no longer linked to active pages, they can be found by search engines. Providers of official statistics should therefore, clean-up their websites.
- The ownership of data should be clearly defined in license notices and conditions of use. Official statistics has to be protected against erroneous interpretation, but there needs to be a balance between providing access and restricting it to prevent misunderstanding. For example, visualisations should be appropriate for the data, but users should be able to choose the visualisations they would like to see.
- Statistical offices should provide different modes of access in order to serve the diverse needs of users. For example, there should be a balance between Internet dissemination and print publications. It is important to ensure links and consistency between these different modes.
- Users are more interested in analysis than raw data tables. This should be addressed in publications prepared by statistical offices, but also through providing data on-line in an appropriate form and making analytical tools available.
- Students are one of the most important user groups as they can be the users of statistics and statisticians of the long-term future. However, their behaviour is unpredictable, and they do not necessarily access data directly from websites of statistical offices. Students are likely to want to find data quickly and will usually search within the on-line environments with which they are familiar. The next step from visualisation is presentation. Students should be shown what is behind the data.
- There are many things in the complex world that cannot be measured accurately. Uncertainties should be clearly explained to the users.
- Visualisation techniques may also help in identifying gaps and requests for new information.

11. The participants considered approaches to monitoring and reacting in the blogosphere and other online media. Such monitoring enables a statistical organization to gauge public reactions to the information being disseminated. Where necessary, reactionary comments can be made to provide clarifications or prevent a misunderstanding of data from escalating into a crisis situation. Statistics

Denmark provided a brief overview of blog and web media technology and described the systems they have developed to maintain information on this activity. The following points were made during the discussion:

- Some statistical agencies reported that they are currently monitoring blogs and new web media, but in some instances the number of mentions is in the thousands per month, so it is a challenge to develop a system to do this effectively. There are some systems available to filter blogs that may decrease the burden of monitoring high volumes of activity.
- Statistical organizations can benefit through the monitoring of blogs and new online media by offering clarifications or corrections of information that has been misunderstood before it escalates into a major issue. The large volume, subjective nature, and varied quality of the information on blogs and similar medium, provides challenges to do this efficiently.

12. Participants learned about the work being done by a group of Central Banks to develop RSS-CB, a standard for RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds of statistical data. The RSS-CB specification outlines the structure of information contained within the feeds. RSS feeds enable users, both human and machine, to receive automatic updates as the data figure is released. This has a range of advantages, such as increasing timeliness, access and in turn usefulness of data. More information on this project is available at <http://www.cbwiki.net>.

13. The OECD provided an overview of their work on uploading their statistics to social visualization websites, such as Swivel and Many Eyes. Their reasons for doing this was to learn more about the possibilities of Web 2.0, reach a wider audience and to get feedback on their statistics. There has been a significant amount of traffic generated from these sites, but the level of interaction with users has been disappointing.

14. Presentations on the dissemination strategies of several statistical organizations illustrated the ongoing shift from print to online publishing. However, print publications are still relevant and are likely to remain so. They are particularly important for library collections and when the print format, or the online equivalent (PDF), is the most appropriate format for textual information.

15. There has been a significant increase in the use of the Internet over the past two years. A survey conducted through the Eurostat Task Force on Visualization indicates that data visualization tools are becoming an important component of the statistical product mix, but there are high costs involved and a range of different technical solutions. Examples of such tools include dynamic population pyramids, personal inflation calculators, and customizable graphs and maps. This kind of meeting is extremely valuable in exchanging experiences, discuss the effectiveness of data visualization tools for communication and help statistical offices to improve their information services.

16. This topic raised issues of access, dissemination, visualization, and considered the need for standard structures of data. Initiatives to collate data sources may provide benefits to users, but we should be cautious of differences between methodologies. Metadata remains a problem for data comparability.

17. A broad range of user groups with diverse needs necessitates a variety of statistical products. There are challenges in bridging the needs of different data users, avoiding misuse and misinterpretations of data and in getting necessary data from the providers. There is also a need to consider and address legal issues associated with the reuse and redistribution of data.

II. BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Documentation: Papers by Lithuania, UNECE (2 papers) and UNICEF.

Session organizers: Mr. Eric St.John and Ms. Martine Grenier (Canada)

18. Increased dissemination and communication of official statistics, in particular, direct access by a large and diverse community of end-users, requires that statistical offices build and maintain

relationships with stakeholders within and outside the organization. Communication professionals play a vital role in this. The discussion on this topic focused on challenges and solutions in:

- developing statistical literacy in relation to helping students and the media understand official statistics;
- extending customer bases and maintaining client relationships;
- developing partnerships;
- managing relationships with policy/decision makers;
- managing internal customer relationships.

19. The UNECE Statistical Division launched its on-line statistical database in 2005. Since then the number of hits and users has grown. An optional registration feature was implemented as a first attempt in knowing more about these users. The incentive for registration was a possibility to save queries on the server, thus obtaining updates more easily. Other incentives will be introduced in line with the development of PC-Axis. The first user survey was launched in September 2007 through the database web site. Users were asked 10 questions. Responses were received from 162 users, exceeding the target of 100. The survey provided better knowledge of the structure of users, frequency of use, geographical areas, satisfaction with the data quality and interface and the area of interest to the users. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- The questionnaire was addressed to a target group that included registered users, representatives of permanent missions in Geneva, and national statistical offices. Students, academics and researchers were almost 50% of the respondents.
- Development of a standard user survey may be useful to allow comparison of results between national and international statistical agencies. The UNECE survey was inspired by a similar Eurostat survey.
- The UNECE Statistical Database is currently available in English and Russian. Due to a lack of resources, the UNECE does not plan to increase the number of languages offered. While the software used for the user survey questionnaire supported only English, there was still a significant proportion of response from the CIS countries.
- In order to improve the interface, the UNECE undertook usability testing at the end of 2006. The software used permitted remote testing, allowing testers to come from a wide geographical area. The tests achieved high success rates in extracting data from the database and highlighted some areas for improvement. The UNECE plans to develop clearer help files, pre-prepared data tables, and an enhanced interface.
- Statistics Canada mentioned its outreach programme targeting universities, government offices, private citizens, and businesses.

20. In developing a statistical literacy system, Statistics Lithuania has introduced activities aimed at identifying gaps in understanding statistics, monitoring user feedback, and customer satisfaction. A system of user surveys has been set up and several user surveys are being organized with monthly, quarterly and annual periodicity. The target group includes public administration, students, researchers, media, policy makers, businesses, international organizations, embassies, non-government organizations and the general public.

21. The concept of statistical literacy used by Statistics Lithuania consists of five components: (i) statistical way of thinking; (ii) key socio-economic concepts, (iii) promotion of statistics, (iv) knowledge of research and analytical methods, and (v) understanding of different presentation modes. The following issues were addressed in the discussion on this project:

- Analysis of school programmes showed that statistics is lectured at secondary schools in an ad-hoc fashion as part of the mathematics programme. Statistics Lithuania launched lecturing programmes at various secondary schools as the school survey results indicated that both students and teachers had expressed interest. Other user groups were also targeted by similar programs; however, an expansion of such activities depends on balancing enthusiasm and available resources at Statistics Lithuania.
- Statistics Canada has developed a programme for secondary schools. This programme is mainly focused on teachers who can use the material provided by Statistics Canada in their

lessons. Another aspect of the strategy is to encourage staff with children to visit their child's school during working hours to talk about statistics and their work at Statistics Canada.

- Statistics Lithuania created a Task Force aimed at improving relations with users composed of experts in public relations, dissemination, as well as subject areas and management.
- The response rate to user surveys depends on visibility of the statistical agency.

22. UNICEF presented a project aimed at improving the statistical literacy of policy-makers as well as strengthening the role of statistics in evidence-based policy-making. Statistical offices have a role in ensuring reliability, relevance, and timeliness of data. They should provide simple and effective access to statistics so policy makers can find the data they need. These efforts are put into a framework of monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. DevInfo software has been offered to statistical offices for this purpose and there are numerous national implementations. The discussion raised the following points:

- Some participants asked about the user friendliness of DevInfo. Two types of training are offered: for data administrators and for data users. The software was developed with the information needs of policy makers in mind.
- Participants enquired about macroeconomic models considered for DevInfo. It was emphasised that DevInfo is not statistical software, but a dissemination tool that is focused on policy makers. The complex models and calculations should be implemented within production systems that feed data into DevInfo.

23. Participants discussed whether to charge for statistical information, disseminate it free-of-charge, or use a combined approach. It seems that data should be disseminated for free, in the interest of promoting fact-based decision making, as well as in light of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics calling for impartial dissemination of data to all users. However, this is a simplistic view. Non-chargeable services are subject to availability of budgeted resources. Users of non-chargeable services obtain only data that the statistical office provides within its resource limits. Chargeable services represent a firm agreement between the users and statistical agencies. Paying customers may also be more likely to react. Diverse opinions were stated during the discussion:

- Statisticians in the 1990's expected that making publications chargeable would decrease demand. In practice, demand may increase. Charging may assign a non-monetary value to statistical products.
- Charging forces statistical offices to listen more to users, to attend exhibitions, and to organize marketing activities. This applies to both printed and electronic products and services. It also strengthens the position of the customer management. Charging for statistical products may also help in setting priorities.
- Some statistical agencies are under a contradictory pressure – to recover costs and to provide information for free. Other statistical agencies do not have any incentive for charging because the income would be absorbed by the general budget. The agency would see no monetary benefit.
- Chargeable products are meaningful only when they are purchased. It is important to research a potential product at multiple stages of development.
- Paper products are still wanted, especially by libraries. While users like on-line access, experience shows that switching completely from print to electronic publications causes a significant drop in the number of subscriptions.
- The general opinion was that a basic access to on-line databases should be free of charge. Extended services, such as special tabulations, aggregation, analysis, generating thematic maps, etc., should be chargeable because they represent a burden on the resources of the statistical office. A question is whether to base charging on costs-recovery or on the added value that special services represent for customers.
- Some participants suggested that harmonization among countries on this issues would be helpful.
- There is a role for chargeable services in the UNECE region. Both chargeable and non-chargeable services should coexist in a balance. Given the lively discussion on this issue in

the past, it is likely this issue will remain in focus and should be discussed at the future events related to statistical dissemination and communication.

24. Statistics Netherlands offered a presentation of its StatWeb database to interested participants during the lunch break.

III. ETHICS AND INDEPENDENCE

Documentation: Papers by UNECE, Canada, United Kingdom and Norway.

Session organizers: Mr. David Marder (United Kingdom)

25. Ethics and independence are fundamental issues for statisticians and are reflected as such in the [Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics](#) and the [European Statistics Code of Practice](#). This topic explored ethical challenges through sharing of experiences and discussion of strategies for achieving independence. The communication of quality and credibility is a key component of this topic.

26. The UNECE Secretariat presented a paper on the implications of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics for the dissemination of results for specific population groups. Data on, for example, ethnic minorities or specific regions carry a risk of giving or reinforcing negative perceptions of such groups. Solutions could include avoiding these issues by not identifying these groups, e.g. by not collecting sensitive variables, or by disseminating only broad aggregates. A more balanced approach would be to consider sensitive aggregates in terms of the normal confidentiality and quality criteria, and to consider fine-tuning to eliminate structural effects, and the addition of an impartial commentary. According to the fourth principle, statistical agencies should react to, and try to correct any erroneous interpretations of data. This requires systematic monitoring of the media, and a policy on how and when to react.

27. Statistics Canada considers communication as an ethical duty, so it is important to get it right. A vital part of this is how to react when errors are discovered. It is becoming increasingly important to be fully transparent in such cases, to maintain trust. A “quality secretariat” of methodologists investigates the source of such errors, and quality assures outputs. The importance of data quality is increasingly stressed in staff training; quality checklists and error reports have been introduced. Users are contacted as soon as errors are discovered. New software to compare different language outputs is being introduced, and was of interest for other participants.

28. The United Kingdom Office for National Statistics recently gained additional independence from ministers, mainly to try to improve public trust in official statistics. A gulf has arisen between the perception of the public and that of statistical experts, with the former being much less trusting of official data. More than half of the public assume that there is political interference with official statistics. Greater independence will include a new code of practice and an independent assessment function under a new statistics authority. Other actions to gain trust include engaging users, improving transparency and clarity, and being seen to be independent. Delegates discussed the issues concerning the pre-release of official data, both to ministers and the press.

29. Statistics Norway considers statistics to be a public good, available to all on equal terms. Equal treatment of all users is a key principle for many statistical agencies, and in Norway this has resulted in the banning of all pre-release access. The principle of equal access is also, in theory, extended throughout government, but is not always applied in other parts of government, as they seek to get better media coverage. There seems to be a correlation between equality of treatment and public trust. Discussion included the possibility of a common strategy between countries for dealing with release to multi-national news media, and the relatively high level of trust in statistical agencies compared to other government departments.

30. During the general discussion the options of post-release embargoes, and pre-release embargoes that are open to all media, were also raised. There was some support for pre-release embargoes as a mechanism to help the media prepare more effective communications for the public,

thus helping to better spread statistical messages. Guidelines on pre-release access were suggested. The timing of releases with respect to news media schedules was also discussed.

IV. MANAGING COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

Documentation: Papers by Denmark, Finland and Netherlands.

Session organizers: Ms. Colleen Flannery and Mr. Kenneth Meyer (United States)

31. This topic focused on the management of communication and dissemination functions within a statistical office. Statistical systems of individual countries are in various stages of integration, which has impact on governance models and communication strategies. Discussion highlighted that in many offices, communication is not sufficiently integrated with dissemination, and additional efforts have to be made to change this. The topic also covered the role of communication and dissemination within the context of a statistical programme, examples of governance models, and management challenges and solutions.

32. Participants discussed issues related to the governance of communication in statistical agencies. The discussion focused on the central functions of communication and its relationship to other activities of the statistical office.

- Governance models should ensure that communication of statistical data received the same attention from management as data dissemination activities and the associated technological infrastructure. This issue needs to be thoughtfully discussed so that effective communication can be ensured.
- Statistical communication has evolved from several areas of the office, notably dissemination, information technology, press office, marketing and human resources management. A modern governance model needs to combine all these aspects within one unit.
- The production environment of statistical offices is currently undertaking a change, in particular moving from a stovepipe approach to a centralized management. Advantages of centralized communication include: a diversified communication environment, and the possibility of larger projects. Disadvantages include a possible increase in management levels, which may result in reduced influence.
- Communication should be recognized as a profession within statistical offices, similarly to subject matter statisticians and methodologists.
- Building communication skills among the staff is important. Communication activities may be carried on at various levels around the whole office. Workplace culture issues need to be addressed when it comes to statistical communication and dissemination systems. For example, the addition of communication specialists to the workplace may be seen as a threat by statistical professionals.

33. The management of stakeholder relationships in connection with the communication was discussed at the work session. An example by Statistics Finland served as a basis. The discussion addressed issues of strategy for communication:

- The stakeholders of a statistical office include other national producers of official statistics, the international statistical service, suppliers of data and holders of administrative registers, government ministries, research institutes and academia and users of statistics. Statistical offices should be careful to ensure impartiality as stakeholder ties increase. Critical connections between stakeholders need to be identified by analyzing the core processes at statistical offices. Key stakeholders need to develop their skills in such a way that they can convey information to stakeholders from other areas.
- Stakeholder cooperation activities can include regularly scheduled meetings or conferences between high level representatives, data suppliers, and university/research institutions. Media relations must be developed to ensure high-quality and broad communication. Trust between stakeholders will increase with more cooperation.
- Corporate communication functions within statistical offices comprise support to core operations, internal socialization (introduction to work and to the office), keeping external and internal stakeholders informed and profiling products and services.

- Many elements need to be taken into account when communicating. Such elements can include customer service principles, flexibility, clarity, ethics, reliability, and trust.
- Management involves a balancing act between information needs, resources (monetary, human resources, etc.), and response burden.
- There are several possibilities for positioning communication within the organizational structure of a statistical office. It is not possible to recommend a unique solution. It is rather a matter of discussion and adjustment to needs of individual statistical offices.
- Communication cannot have an independent objective within the organization. The communication strategy should contribute to achieving the goals of the broader business strategy of the organization.

34. Methods for improving governance of dissemination, as part of a project to redesign the main on-line dissemination channel, were illustrated by the example of the StatLine database (Statistics Netherlands). The following points were highlighted in the discussion:

- Improved dissemination requires more than just a single database. Terms used in different tables should be harmonized/standardized, data made consistent across different tables and combined tables provided where meaningful. It might be difficult to achieve this ultimate goal at once and a staged approach would be advisable.
- Improved dissemination requires participation of top managers as well as end-users and subject matter units. Communication should be two-way and there should be also incentives and rewards to motivate adoption of new dissemination processes.
- An organizational model used in Statistics Netherlands focuses communication externally and dissemination internally. This model requires a close cooperation between the two units.

35. The general discussion on governance of communication and dissemination raised the following issues:

- It is important that executive managers in the core of a governance structure have a corporate attitude, rather than defending only particular interests or work units.
- Complex metadata descriptions provide end-users with all necessary information, but may be discouraging for less experienced users. One way would be to rewrite those descriptions to a more common language that can be easily understood. Participants suggested a hierarchical approach that would provide simplified metadata and more experienced users would be able to access the complete metadata descriptions.
- In some offices, media and/or users can directly contact subject matter departments. However, it is advisable that a central unit is also included in this communication, in order to better understand information needs and draw lessons from it. Questions related to statistical releases should be logged in a database for analysis. Information gathered from such analysis can be useful for identifying users and for correcting errors.
- Maintaining a unified message to the public can be difficult. The larger the statistical organization, the more complex this issue becomes. There was no clear solution to this problem. Some offices provide media training to statistics professionals, while others have media liaison responsibility resting solely with the communication experts.

36. Particular attention during the general discussion was paid to communication with respect to regional statistical offices.

- There should be a clear relationship with regional offices defined when it comes to dissemination and communication. Central coordination between headquarter and regional offices and an overall strategy is essential.
- In large countries this also involves issues related to time zones. Release times and reference periods for local data are influenced by this.
- Particular attention should be given to monitoring communication. Some users address the nearest regional office and knowledge of such communication is needed for management at the headquarters level.
- There are also some specific regional responsibilities relevant to communication. In this

respect, regional offices should play an important role and not act solely as implementers of initiatives from headquarters.

- There may be a need to reconcile differences in data available at the regional and national level.
- The corporate identity of a statistical office with several regional offices should be considered. Regional offices may have a legitimate ambition to identify themselves with the region and/or topics they deal with.

V. OPEN DISCUSSION

Discussant: Ms. Gina Pearson (United States)

37. Participants were asked to identify the themes that emerged from the meeting. They were:

- The importance of identifying, understanding and communicating with customers and stakeholders;
- The need to successfully serve many diverse audiences and user groups; developing a suite of general and targeted products;
- Managing customer feedback and product usage information;
- Challenges of a changing environment, both internal to the organization (for example, moving from a single press secretary to a public relations office) and external (for example adapting the product suite and web site to suit more diverse client groups and needs);
- Keeping up with the latest communications and technology tools (RSS, blogs, pods and video casting, wikis, data visualization techniques, etc.) in the context of how these technologies can be used to improve communication, not how the technology works.
- The need for standard structures for data integration, exchange and comparability. Metadata is a recurrent issue, but it has been discussed at previous meetings and is a focus of other international fora. Expected outcomes would have to be clarified before putting it on the future work programme for statistical dissemination and communication.
 - SDMX is a standard for data exchange that can provide standard structures.
 - The UNECE informed that meetings and work of experts in metadata from statistical organizations (METIS) is jointly organized by the UNECE, OECD and Eurostat. They have developed a Common Metadata Framework (www.unece.org/stats/cmf).
- Quality assurance; methods for preventing errors from leaving the office and how to deal with the situation if they do.
- The importance of political independence and equal treatment of media
- Requests for and confidentiality of data;
- Education programs and methods for increasing statistical literacy;
- Clarifying the role of the communication versus the dissemination area; the centralization of dissemination functions, particularly in decentralized statistical systems.

38. The discussions over the three days of the workshop raised several questions that were considered during the open discussion:

- One of the tasks of the communication area is to train statistical and subject-matter specialists to design and write reports that tell interesting stories. Writing for a non-statistical audience requires specific skills. [see [Making Data Meaningful: a guide to writing stories about numbers](#) (2005)]
- The functional branches needed for the communication arm of a national statistical organization were discussed. This comprises a range of activities and will really depend on the priorities of the statistical office. It was noted that some offices have both internal and external communication branches.
- How can web governance be integrated with the web content? It appears that in some offices the IT areas are developing tools and systems for the web, but without adequate consideration to the business needs. There is a need to strengthen the link between the core business and the IT functions. A website should be governed by a group including IT experts, subject-matter specialists and communication specialists.

- How has the 24/7 news cycle provided challenges and opportunities for statistical communication? There does not seem to be a substantive change with respect to the content. The life of the communication unit is more hectic and the whole office should be more involved, but these are organizational rather than content issues.
- How much influence should stakeholders have concerning the inclusion of content questions and formats? The stakeholders should have a say into questions addressed by a survey. However, with a professional independence of statisticians, stakeholders should not influence the content of publications and other products. It can be a challenge to find a balance between remaining both independent and relevant to stakeholders.
- Should an “international statistics access license” be created? There are several initiatives presently going on. The copyright issues are very important. It may be ideal if such license is created, but there are numerous legal issues to resolve. Some offices are considering using watermarks and other technical instruments for the copyright protection. The Australian Bureau of Statistics plans to conduct more research into this issue and may be able to share their findings at a later date.
- Are there special policies or rules for dissemination of sensitive group-specific results? This may apply to small groups as well as particular aspects of the economy. Examples included ethnic groups, business branches, offenders, etc. Release of sensitive group-specific results requires close consideration of communication strategies.
- To charge or not to charge for statistical information and what are the price policies? Some statistical offices charge for special outputs and printed publications. There seems to be a scope for co-existence of both free-of-charge as well as chargeable products.

39. The World Health Organization presented the Joint Monitoring Programme for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals, in particular target 7.c aimed at halving by 2015 the number of people without access to a safe drinking water. The dissemination and communication of results required improvement into classification for sanitation and water. The WHO representative asked the participants to support this project by improving their collection and dissemination of this data.

V. FUTURE WORK

40. The participants recalled that the group was originally created under the title of “Statistical Output for Dissemination to Information Media” in 1994 and gradually enlarged its scope to address communication issues and audiences other than the media. Papers discussed at meetings since 1997 along with two guides published: “Communicating with the Media” and “Making Data Meaningful” are available on the UNECE website (www.unece.org/stats/publ.htm).

41. Some participants recommended that the future work should focus more on communication and that this may be better facilitated by removing reference to dissemination from the title of the meeting. Other participants advocated for maintaining a strong link between communication and dissemination.

42. Participants considered international cooperation in this field as useful and recommended to organize, subject to approval by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians, the next Work Session on Statistical Communication (and Dissemination) in May 2009. The following topics of interest were specified:

- Education programs and strategies;
- Access licenses for statistics;
- To charge or not for statistical services; costing models;
- More on managing communication;
- Quality assurance.

[Discussion of this issue by the steering group raised the following further suggestions:

- Improving internal communication (working better together);
- Working with the media; media training;
- Communicating in a Crisis and managing credibility.]

43. Any statistical office that wishes to host the next work session should inform the UNECE Secretariat.

44. There were five suggestions for potential future products. A survey undertaken among participants resulted in selection of a “Style Guide for the Presentation of Data and Graphics”. The Steering Group and any other participants who express interest will prepare the draft version of the product for publication in late 2008 / early 2009.
