



**Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities**  
**Conference on Data Quality for International Organizations**  
**Wiesbaden, Germany, 27 and 28 May 2004**



**FOLLOW UP TO THE Q2004 SATELLITE CONFERENCE ON DATA QUALITY  
FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Prepared by UNSD

**I. Introduction**

The Conference on Data Quality for International Organizations, organized by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) and hosted by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany took place on 27/28 May 2004. The Conference was attended by 32 participants from 15 international organizations, as well as 25 representatives from 10 national statistical offices.

This Conference was the first meeting of the CCSA, which was entirely dedicated to one specific substantive topic. It followed the holding of the “European Conference on Quality and Methodology in Official Statistics - Q2004”, (Mainz/Germany from 24-26 May 2004). The Conference was opened by Mr. Walter Radermacher, Vice-president of the German Statistical Office. Mr. Willem de Vries, Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Statistics Division and Mr. Enrico Giovannini, Director, OECD Statistics Directorate, also presented opening remarks.

The Conference was structured in three thematic sessions on “Quality frameworks for assessing and improving statistical activities carried out by international organizations”, “Coherence of data published by various international organizations on the same subject” and “Tools and policies for collecting, managing and disseminating data and metadata”, in which a total of 14 conference papers were presented. Representatives from national statistical offices acted as discussants of the various sessions. The Conference was concluded with a Panel Discussion on “Future directions for international cooperation to ensure data quality”, the main conclusions of which are reflected in the following section. The programme and the list of participants are attached to this note. Detailed information on the event as well as all the papers presented can be found on the conference website at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/acsub/CDQIO.htm>.

**II. Conclusions of the final panel discussion**

1. Fundamental principles: At the national level, the 'Fundamental Principles for official statistics' provide the basis from which notions of quality can be derived. It was generally considered useful to develop a similar basis for the international statistical system in the form of the declaration of principles for international statistics.

2. Production of international data: It was observed, that there are in principle certain process-similarities regarding the 'information production process' between national and international organizations: National statistical offices transform raw data given to them by their providers into a set of national data for their policy users. International organizations are entrusted by their member countries with national data, which constitute, in turn, their raw material for the production of international data. At the international level, the transformation/production process aims at adding value through data validation, by adapting data to international standards, by calculating indicators, by disseminating data sets and by promoting the policy use.

3. Quality dimensions: At the national level the debate on data quality is much more advanced than at the international level. Quality dimensions (such as accuracy, relevance, timeliness etc.) have been identified and are widely used by countries to manage data quality. Many of the quality dimensions developed to describe national data sets carry over directly to international data sets. There are, however, at least two specific dimensions of quality, which apply at the international level: (i) coverage - for how many countries/regions are data available and (ii) comparability - to what extent is the information for different countries/regions comparable?

4. Quality assessment versus quality assurance: In principle the quality of data released by international organizations depends on two fundamentally different elements: (i) the data provided by national statistical systems and (ii) the processes of transformation applied by the international organizations. Some international statistical units have started to develop tools to review their processes. During the conference it was considered useful to refer to these tools as 'quality assurance' frameworks, rather than 'quality assessment' frameworks, as the latter could be misleading as referring back to the country data.

5. Degree of coordination/cooperation: International statistical organization face increased resource pressures and demands of countries to reduce reporting burden and to ensure coherence of dissemination of country data at the international level. This, in turn, increases the incentives to cooperate. The following three steps for the degree of cooperation were suggested: harmonizing/standardizing/integrating; the current situation is characterized by efforts to harmonize practices, with some elements to develop standards, for example with respect to metadata presentation and electronic data exchange. The vision of an integrated international statistical system, with an appropriate division of labour where international statistical units specialize on the data production in their area of their expertise, could only work on the basis of more formal arrangements and agreements. For instance, a specific international agency would only be willing to give up a data collection activity, which is considered crucial for their users, if it is given sufficient assurances, that a designated partner agency will produce the data with sufficient coverage, according to pre-specified minimum quality standards, at the right time etc. The development of model 'memoranda of understanding' was suggested in this context as a helpful step forward.

6. Importance of metadata and information technology: The importance of metadata for the assessment and assurance of data quality was stressed repeatedly; in this context it was suggested that the development of a common 'metadata language' for international statistical offices would be useful. The development of metadata is often closely linked to the increased use of

information technology. IT is useful in making even complex data editing and data quality control procedures possible and explicit. The use of IT, thus, facilitates the development of common 'languages'. The SDMX initiative was repeatedly mentioned as a good and concrete example for cooperation of international statistical organizations in the field of data quality improvement.

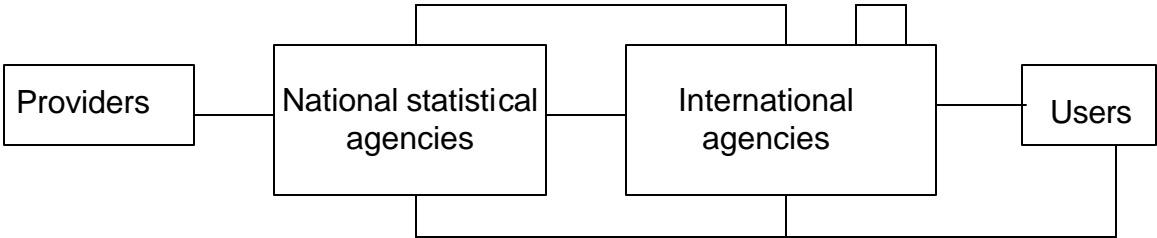
7. Division of labour: The attached framework<sup>1</sup> was suggested as a useful basis to describe the overall framework of the current quality debate: It describes on the left hand side the situation at the national level and identifies on the right hand side the equivalent elements at the international level. It puts at the top the 'fundamental principles' as a starting point, from which via certain tools ultimately data quality assessment frameworks (DQAF) are derived. The equivalent ideas at the international level would be an International Data Bulletin Board (IDBB), an International Data Quality Assessment Framework (IDQAF) or International Data Dissemination Standards (IDDS). Once common quality standards have been developed and agreed upon at the international level, this would facilitate the provision of common training and software by international organizations to countries. This framework facilitates a debate on the following questions: (i) which are the elements that are already available, (ii) which are the elements that still need to be developed and (iii) who would be the most appropriate body to develop these elements further.

8. Role of CCSA: On the one hand the importance of CCSA as a forum to further develop quality frameworks at the international level was stressed, as the CCSA is composed of statistical managers, with responsibilities for international data systems. On the other hand it was stressed that in order to make effective progress in the development and implementation of international quality standards, the CCSA would need to be given an appropriate mandate by countries. It was also concluded that national statisticians need to remain closely involved in the further debate on international quality standards. In this context the format of the conference, which brought together international and national statisticians was welcome and it was suggested that similar CCSA sponsored meetings could take place in conjunction with the future planned biennial quality conferences.

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<sup>1</sup> This framework has been elaborated further by Enrico Giovannini in his paper "Towards a common strategy of international organizations to improve the quality of international statistics", (see also SA/2004/6/Add.1).

Fundamental principles for official statistics	Principles for international statistics
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SDMX – Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange – Standards and Tools

International statistical standards and recommendations

NSOs assurance quality frameworks	IOs assurance quality frameworks
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DQAF/SDDS/GDDS	IDBB/IDQAF/IDDS
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IOs common training and software

## Annex 1: Conference Agenda

Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities  
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Programme

Thursday, 27 May 2004

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9.30 – 10.00 **Welcome and introduction**

- Walter Radermacher (Germany)
- Willem de Vries (UNSD)
- Enrico Giovannini (OECD)

10.00 - 12.15 **Session 1: Quality frameworks for assessing and improving statistical activities carried out by international organizations**

Chair: Carol Carson (IMF)

- Ivo Havinga, Gsele Kamanou, Stefan Schweinfest and Willem de Vries (UNSD) "Squaring the Quality Circle: Towards a Quality Framework for International Official Statistics"
- Enrico Giovannini and Denis Ward (OECD) "Quality Framework for OECD Statistics: Getting our own house in order"
- Haluk Kasnakoglu and Robert Mayo (FAO) "FAO Statistical Data Quality Framework: A multi-layered approach to monitoring and assessment "

Discussant: Gordon Brackstone (Statistics Canada)

12.15 - 13.30 Lunch break

13.30 - 15.30 **Session 2: Coherence of data published by various international organizations on the same subject**

Chair: Denise Lievesly (UIS)

- Haishan Fu (UNDP) "Data inconsistency, statistical credibility and the Human Development Report".
- Edilberto Loaiza (UNICEF) "Does data quality explain the difference in the current global estimates for mortality and education?"
- Andreas Lindner and Richard McKenzie (OECD) "Co-ordination of data disseminated by international organizations".
- Darryl Rhoades (ECE) "Towards a methodology for analyzing coherence between PPP and SNA based estimates of GDP"
- Neil Fantom (World Bank) "Introducing a PARIS21 study of the international statistical system in relation to MDG indicators: Monitoring the Millennium Development Goals: current weakness and possible improvements"

Discussant: Michael Colledge (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

15.30 - 16.00 Coffee break

16.00 - 18.00 **Session 3: Tools and policies for collecting, managing and disseminating data and metadata (1)**

Chair: Sylvester Young (ILO)

- Tetsuo Yamada (UNIDO) "Role of metadata in quality assurance of multi-country statistical data in the case of UNIDO industrial statistics"
- Sara Elder and Isabelle Guillet (ILO) "ILO tools for collecting, managing and disseminating data and metadata".
- Brian Buffet, Alison Kennedy and Ursula Itzlinger (UNESCO) "The Path towards Improving Quality in the International Education Database".

Discussant: Lucic Laliberte (IMF)

Friday, 28 May 2004

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9.00 – 11.00 **Session 3: Tools and policies for collecting, managing and disseminating data and metadata (2)**

Chair: Stefan Schweinfest (UNSD)

- Patrick Cornu (ILO) "ILO Labour Statistics Database (LABORSTA): The issue of quality control procedures".
- Lee Samuelson and Lars Thygesen (OECD) "Building OECD's New Statistical Information System"
- Christos Androvitsaneas (ECB) "Contributing to quality in statistics through automated data and metadata exchange: the case of the European System of Central Banks"
- Carol Carson (IMF) "Data and Metadata Collection and Dissemination in the IMF Statistical Information System".

Discussant: Deborah Griffin (USA, Census Bureau)

11.00 - 11.30 Coffee break

11.30 - 13.00 **Panel discussion: Future directions for international cooperation to ensure data quality**

Chair: Enrico Giovannini (OECD)

Panelists: Carol Carson (IMF), Denise Lievesly (UIS), Sylvester Young (ILO) and Stefan Schweinfest (UNSD)

## **Annex 2: List of participants**

### **List of participants**

#### **United Nations entities and Programmes**

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