REPORT

In accordance with the Terms of Reference of SAARCSTAT, the Meetings of SAARCSTAT are to be held in the Member States in alphabetical order. Accordingly, the Third Meeting of Heads of SAARC Statistical Organisations (SAARCSTAT), was held at Paro, Bhutan on 18-19 November 2010.

2. The Meeting was inaugurated by H.E. Lyonpo Dorji Wangdi, Minister of Labour and Human Resources, Royal Government of Bhutan. He welcomed the delegates to Bhutan and emphasised the importance of cooperation in the field of statistics among the SAARC Member States.

3. On behalf of Secretary General of SAARC, H.E. Dr. Sheel Kant Sharma, Mr. Amrit Lugun, Director, SAARC Secretariat thanked the Royal Government of Bhutan for hosting the Meeting, for warm hospitality extended to the delegates and for making excellent arrangements for the same. He expressed gratitude to the Hon’ble Minister for taking time out from his busy schedule to inaugurate the Meeting and stated that the presence of the Hon’ble Minister demonstrated the importance attached to the SAARC process by the Royal Government of Bhutan. Giving a brief background on the cooperation in the field of statistics, Mr. Lugun emphasised the critical importance of taking expeditious and timely action by all Member States for implementation of the recommendations of SAARCSTAT.

4. The leader of the delegation of Bangladesh in his capacity as the current Chairperson of SAARCSTAT opened the Third Meeting of Heads of SAARC Statistical Organisations (SAARCSTAT). In his opening remarks he expressed thanks to the Members of SAARCSTAT for cooperation extended to Bangladesh during its chairmanship of SAARCSTAT.

6. As per SAARC practice, Mr. Kuenga Tshering, Director, National Statistical Bureau, Royal Government of Bhutan and the leader of the delegation of Bhutan was elected the Chairperson of the Meeting.

7. The Meeting reviewed the progress in the implementation of recommendations contained in the Report of Second Meeting of SAARCSTAT (Dhaka, 17 April 2008) and in the Report of the First Meeting of Coordinators of SAARCSTAT Technical Sub-Groups (Dhaka, 16 April 2008).

8. The Meeting held discussion on the Concept Note by India on the Terms of Reference for Establishment of Liaison Office of SAARCSTAT at SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu. It discussed the matter and agreed in principle for establishment of the Liaison Office. India will prepare a revised proposal with financial implications based on comments to be received from the countries for consideration of the higher SAARC bodies.

9. The delegation of Bangladesh made a presentation on the Yearbook and provided a CD-ROM containing the soft copy of the Yearbook to each Delegation.
10. Regarding Informal Sector, India briefed the Meeting. India agreed to circulate an updated paper through the SAARC Secretariat. The Meeting noted that all Member States except Bhutan and Maldives have set up Expert Group on Informal Sector. The Meeting urged the importance of setting up of Expert Group by all Member States.

11. Regarding Capacity Building, India informed that it organised two training programmes successfully. It also informed that another Training Programme on Industrial, Trade and Services Statistics (including Transport, Communications and Finance) to be held by 31 December 2010. The Meeting also noted that some Member States faced financial constraints in availing themselves of such Training Programmes. The sending Member States will be required to bear the international airfare and DSA as per their own national practice, as per past practice. However boarding, lodging and cost of training to the participants will be provided by the Host Government.

12. Regarding SAARCSTAT Action Plan, in order to develop and publish (a) Catalogue of Publications; and (b) Directory of Statistical Experts of SAARC Member States, the delegation of Maldives requested Member States to provide updated information. The Member States while supplying the information on catalogue of publications may include the scanned picture of the front page, its title and abstract. The delegation of the Maldives informed that these publications would be brought out in the form of a CD-ROM.

13. The delegation of Pakistan made a presentation on the SAARCSTAT Website and provided a copy of the Draft Website on CD-ROM and requested Member States to examine the design and content and provide their inputs/comments by 31 December 2010.

14. About SNA, the delegation of Sri Lanka made a presentation and provided a copy of data on GDP of Member States. He informed that there are several gaps which need to be bridged.

15. With regard to Classification, the delegation of Pakistan informed that a template prepared by them was circulated. It informed that it will prepare an updated Template based on ISIC Rev.4 by 31 December 2010. The CPC template will be provided by Pakistan by 31 March 2011. The Member States should send their comments within two months of receipt of templates.

Discussion on introduction of Exchange programme of expert Statisticians through MOU

16. The Second Meeting of SAARCSTAT (Dhaka, 17 April 2008) held extensive discussions on the matter and observed that the Member States need to examine in detail the elements of an agreement or an MOU on regional basis before it could be agreed in principle. The Third Meeting agreed that Pakistan will draft a framework MOU and send the same to the Member States by 31 December 2010. Thereafter all Member States would provide their comments on the Draft MOU by 30 June 2011. Based on these comments, Pakistan will prepare a revised MOU for consideration of the Fourth Meeting of SAARCSTAT.
Review of progress in the Project on Concepts, Definitions and Standards of Health Statistics for the SAARC region.

17. The delegation of India agreed to make a Manual on Health Statistics. The broad outline of the Manual bringing out the main activities to be included based upon the practices being followed at national/international level will be ready by March 2011. The SAARC Member States would be requested to furnish their comments/observations within a month of the circulation. Based on the suggestions, India will prepare a Manual covering India and as much detailed information as readily available for SAARC Countries. The Manual will be circulated through the SAARC Secretariat for comments/observation of the Member States. The delegation of India informed that at the next Meeting of SAARCSTAT, India will provide the status of publication of Manual.

Discussion on development of institutional framework for data collection on Trade in Services

18. As agreed at the Second Meeting, the Member States were to set up country teams including representatives of Ministries of Commerce/Ministry of Foreign Trade, Central banks and National Statistical Offices. The Meeting noted that all Member States, except Bhutan and the Maldives have taken action in this regard. India made a presentation on Status note.

19. The Director, SAARC Secretariat informed the Meeting that as recommended by the Second Meeting of SAARCSTAT, the matter relating to data collection on Trade in Services has been brought to the attention of SAARCFINANCE. He also informed the Meeting that it is in the process of collaborating with the Asian Development Bank for preparing a separate Regional Technical Assistance (RETA) proposal to facilitate short and long term capacity building of the Member States in data collection on trade in services. The RETA proposal received from ADB will be submitted by the Secretariat to higher SAARC bodies for consideration.

20. The Meeting also recommended on the need to have a Workshop on data collection with the financial and technical assistance of ADB for the benefit of Member States.

Discussion on SAARC forum for disability statistics

21. The Second Meeting of SAARCSTAT discussed the matter in detail and agreed to constitute an informal virtual group under the chairmanship of Pakistan to collect information on existing practices and definitions being followed by the Member States on collection of data on disability.

22. The Meeting noted Pakistan has nominated Director General, Federal Bureau of Statistics as the Focal Point on Disability Statistics and some of the Member States have provided their inputs. The Meeting discussed the matter and agreed that national data collection practices and availability of data on disability would be provided by all Member States to Pakistan by 31 December 2010 which would examine the data and make a common template and circulate to Member States for comments through the SAARC Secretariat.
23. On behalf of all visiting delegations, Mr. Arif Mahmood Cheema, Deputy Director General, Federal Bureau of Statistics, Islamabad and the leader of the delegation of Pakistan proposed a vote of thanks to the Chairperson for conducting the deliberations of the Meeting in a successful manner. He also thanked the SAARC Secretariat for extending support for the success of the Meeting.