

REPORT

The Fourth Meeting of Heads of SAARC Statistical Organisations (SAARCSTAT), was held in Islamabad, Pakistan on 24-25 October 2011. The proceedings of the inaugural session commenced with the recitation of the verses of Holy Quran and National Anthem of Pakistan.

2. Mr. Asif Bajwa, Secretary, Statistics Division, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Statistics, Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, inaugurated the Meeting. He welcomed the participants to Pakistan and emphasised on the need for SAARCSTAT to now play its due role in SAARC and come up with common classification and comparable tables in all areas. He urged that the products of SAARCSTAT should be disseminated through a Website and Yearbook. He expressed concern that no website for SAARCSATAT exists as of now, though planning for it has been going on for sometime. He also underlined the need to conduct training programmes in various fields by all Member States. He emphasised on the importance of fixing timeframes within which all decisions of SAARCSTAT should be implemented. Mr. Bajwa wished the delegates fruitful deliberations and memorable stay in Islamabad.

3.1 The following two Agenda Items were added for discussion in the Meeting:

- (i) New Areas:
 - (a) Sample Surveys and related issues;
 - (b) Gender Statistics; and
 - (c) Agricultural Statistics
- (ii) Plan of Action of SAARCSTAT with timeframe

3.2 The status of work of the following items were reviewed:

- a. SAARC Statistical Yearbook
- b. Capacity Building
- c. Informal Sector
- d. Catalogue of Statistical Publications
- e. Directory of Statistical Experts
- f. System of National Accounts

(a) SAARC Statistical Yearbook

4. The delegation of Bangladesh made a presentation on the status of publication of SAARC Statistical Yearbook. He informed that updated data has not been received from most of the Member States. However, he informed that Bangladesh has come up with the updated version with whatever data received so far from the Member States. A soft copy of the updated Yearbook was distributed during the Meeting.

5. After detailed discussions, the Meeting agreed as follows:
- a. All Member States would provide their updated data to Bangladesh as per the templates latest by **end-December 2011** by e-mail directly at salamstat@yahoo.com (Mr. Md. Shamsul Alam, Director, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Dhaka. Tel: 008802-9132543);
 - b. Based on the updated inputs received from the Member States, Bangladesh would upload the latest version of SAARC Statistical Yearbook on its website and also provide soft copies of the same to all Member States through the SAARC Secretariat by the **end-March 2012**.
 - c. SAARC Statistical Yearbook would be published and printed once in two years.
 - d. The updated soft copy of the Yearbook would be made available annually.
 - e. The Yearbook may also include graphs depicting the relevant information of SAARC region as a whole.
 - f. A Leaflet “SAARC in Figures” would be published every year. The Meeting welcomed the offer of Nepal for publishing the same. In order to prepare the Leaflet, Nepal would draft a Template for circulation to Member States by end of December 2011 and Member States would convey their comments on the Template by end January 2012. Thereafter, data would be provided by the Member States by March 2012 to uttammalla@cbs.gov.np and u_malla@yahoo.com (Mr. Uttam Narayan Malla, Director-General, Central Bureau of Statistics, Kathmandu, Tel : 009771-4229407). The final Leaflet will be published by Nepal by the **end-July 2012**.

(b) **Capacity Building**

6. The Meeting noted the requirement of Training in following areas:
- Industrial Trade and Service Statistics;
 - System of National Accounts;
 - Statistical system of Classification;
 - Health and Demographic Statistics;
 - Poverty & Inequality;
 - Gender Statistics.
 - Producer Price Index & Index of Industrial Production;
 - Forecasting Methods applicable to various sectors
 - Trade in Services;
 - Energy Statistics.

7. Following arrangement of conducting Training was agreed, where the local hospitality and local transport would be provided by the host Member State and the training fees would also be waived.:

Topic	To be organised by
Labour Market Analysis through Labour Force Statistics	Pakistan
Agricultural Statistics including animal husbandry and horticulture, crop area estimates and use of GIS technology	India
Gender Issues and Gender Statistics with special reference to Informal sector	India
Data Editing, Analysis and processing	India

(c) Informal Sector

8. The Meeting noted that a Revised Paper on Informal Sector was prepared and circulated by India. It was noted that except Bhutan and Maldives all other Member States have set up their expert group on informal sector. The delegations of Bhutan and Maldives informed that they will be setting up their national expert group in this regard shortly.

9. As a long term action plan in this field, it was decided that Bangladesh, based on their experience on pilot survey on informal sector and the country papers to be sent by all the Member States, would prepare a Base Paper, inter-alia, containing the issues for further follow-up action and the draft strategy with a view to estimate statistics relating to Informal Sector. The paper prepared by Bangladesh would be discussed in the Fifth Meeting of SAARCSTAT scheduled to be held in the Maldives in 2012.

(d) Catalogue of Statistical Publications

(e) Directory of Statistical Experts

10. The delegation of Maldives informed the Meeting about the current status of publication of Catalogue of Statistical Publications and Directory of Statistical Experts. The Meeting noted with appreciation that Maldives had prepared both the Catalogue of Statistical Publications and Directory of Statistical Experts with inputs received from all Member States except Afghanistan and Bangladesh. The delegation of Maldives informed that the inputs from Bangladesh which was received after the preparation of these two documents will be incorporated in the final publications. The delegation of Afghanistan also agreed to provide its inputs for the two publications to the Maldives shortly.

11. With regard to the Catalogue of Statistical Publications, the Meeting agreed that the information about publications may be given in three separate categories i.e. (i) regular publications; (ii) ad-hoc publications; and (iii) need-based publications. The contents of publications may also be given in brief, if possible.

12. With regard to the Directory of Statistical Experts also, the Meeting agreed to categorise the experts as follows: (i) Serving; (ii) Retired; and (iii) other academicians and researchers. The area of subject/speciality of the experts may also be indicated against each expert.

13. The Meeting agreed that all Member States would give updated information about the Catalogue and Directory in three separate categories to the Maldives as recommended above by

December 2011 through e-mail and the Maldives will prepare the final publications by end-February 2012.

(f) System of National Accounts

14. The Meeting recommended that all Member States would provide their latest data for 2010-2011 to Sri Lanka by the **end of November 2011** and Sri Lanka will prepare the revised tables and provide the same with latest inputs from Member States by **31 January 2012**.

SAARCSTAT Website

15. The Secretariat informed the Meeting that as mandated by the Thirty-eighth Session of the Standing Committee, it approached the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to provide financial and technical assistance for development of web-based, user-protected interface and institution of a designated Statistics Cell at Secretariat for coordinating all statistical data or requirements thereof. In this regard, a positive response has been received from ADB and a consultant for this purpose has also been identified.

Discussion on matters relating to SAARC Classification

16. The Meeting noted with appreciation that Pakistan has prepared SAARC Standard Industrial Classification (SSIC) based on ISIC Rev. 4 and the same has already been distributed among all Member States in hard copies as well as on CD-ROM.

17. The Meeting agreed that all Member States may provide their updated inputs to Pakistan by **31 December 2011** for incorporation into the final version of the SSIC so that the same is finalised by Pakistan by **31 March 2012**.

Project on Concepts, Definitions and Standards of Health Statistics for the SAARC region.

18. The Meeting noted with appreciation that a draft outline of the Manual for the Project on Concepts, Definitions and Standards of Health Statistics has been prepared and circulated by India. The delegation of India informed that comments have been received from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

19. The Meeting agreed that with a view to finalise the draft outline of the Manual and to start preparation of the Manual itself, the comments of the Member States may be conveyed to India by 31 December 2011. Additional comments, if any, may also be provided to India by the Member States. India may start the preparation of the Manual by 31 March 2012. The progress in this regard will be reviewed at the Fifth Meeting of the SAARCSTAT.

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

20. The Meeting noted that as recommended by the Thirteenth Meeting of Committee on Economic Cooperation held in Dhaka on 24-25 November 2007, matters relating to capacity building for collection of statistics on Trade in Services in the Region are also being discussed in the Meetings of SAARCSTAT.

21. The Director, SAARC Secretariat informed the Meeting that the Asian Development Bank had appointed a consultant on conducting a Study on Development of institutional framework for Data Collection on Trade in Services, including capacity building as recommended by the Committee on Economic Cooperation and Second Meeting of Heads of SAARC Statistical Organizations. In order to finalise the Terms of Reference of the Consultant, an Inception Workshop was held at the SAARC Secretariat on 23-24 June 2011 which also considered and finalised the Terms of Reference of two other Studies being conducted for SAARC by ADB i.e. on Economic Integration and on Development of Capital Markets in South Asia. The representatives from all Member States, Asian Development Bank and the Consultants and Resource Persons appointed for conducting the Studies attended the Inception Workshop.

22. The Meeting suggested that since National Statistical Organisations (NSOs) of all Member Countries have the mandate of coordinating collection of data relating to all the sectors including trade in services, the Consultant should be in regular touch with the NSOs of all the Member Countries.

23. The Meeting recommended that more intensive discussion is required to look into the matter relating to collection of data on trade in services with the involvement of National Statistical Organisations. A sector-specific approach is also required for collection of data. The Meeting requested the Secretariat to convey its recommendations to Asian Development Bank and to the Consultant and request them to consult the Members of SAARCSTAT before finalising the report.

Discussion on SAARC forum for disability statistics

24. The Meeting recalled that the Second Meeting of SAARCSTAT 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. The Third Meeting of SAARCSTAT agreed that national data collection practices and availability of data on disability would be provided by all Member States to Pakistan which would examine the data and make a common template and circulate to Member States for comments through the SAARC Secretariat.

25. The delegation of Pakistan briefed the Meeting about the status in this regard and noted that information on disability statistics is available in the population census and other socio-economic surveys of the Member States. The Meeting agreed that all Member States would provide their data on disability statistics to Pakistan by 31 January 2012 and Pakistan would prepare a Draft publication “**SAARC Disability Statistics**” for final comments of the Member States by 31 March 2012. Based on the comments received from Member States, Pakistan would publish the final version of “**SAARC Disability Statistics**” by **30 June 2012**.

26. The Meeting also noted that India is preparing a Manual on Disability Statistics which is expected to be ready by 31 March 2012. The Meeting requested that the Manual may be circulated by India through the SAARC Secretariat and the indicators contained therein which are common to all Member States may be considered for inclusion in the Second Version of the SAARC Disability Statistics.

Discussion on status of nominating a single Nodal Officer for SAARCSTAT work within the National Statistical Organisations for faster exchange of information and data

27. At the Third Meeting of SAARCSTAT, it was agreed that the Member States would establish a single Nodal Officer for SAARCSTAT work within the National Statistical Organisations for faster exchange of information and data relating to areas agreed above and provide their contact details (Tel/Fax/e-mail) to the SAARC Secretariat by 31 December 2010. It was also agreed that a copy of all information and data to be sent to the SAARC Secretariat would also be sent to these Nodal Officers on SAARCSTAT for advance information and expeditious action.

28. In this regard, the Meeting noted that information on Nodal Officers has been received only from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka as given below:

Bangladesh	Mr. Aynul Kabir Director, National Accounting Wing , Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Dhaka Tel : 9133381 Fax: 9111064 E-mail: kabir_62@yahoo.com
Bhutan	Mr. Dawa, Offtg. Chief and Sr. Statistical Officer, Coordination and Information Divison, National Statistics Bureau, Bhutan e-mail: dawa_t2003@yahoo.co.uk
India	Mr. A.K. Mehra, Additional Director General, Central Statistical Organisation, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, New Delhi Tel : 009111-2331 0721; Fax : 009111-23311805; E-mail: akmehra@nic.in
Maldives	Ms. Ashiyath Shazna Assistant Director Statistics Development and Coordination Section Statistics Division, Department of National Planning Ministry of Finance and Treasury shazna@planning.gov.mv
Sri Lanka	Mr. D.C.A. Gunawardhana, Director Prices and Wages Division, Department of Census and Statistics P.O. Box 563, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka. Tel : 94 - 112676196 email : prices@statistics.gov.lk

29. The Meeting urged the other Member States to convey the details of their Nodal Officers to the SAARC Secretariat **by 15 November 2011**.

30. The Meeting agreed that it would be useful if the Nodal Officers of the Member States coordinating a project or plan of action also remain in touch with the Nodal Officers of other Member States to seek their timely inputs for finalisation of the project in the given timeframe.

31. For smooth exchange of communications and for implementing the recommendations of SAARCSTAT in a timely manner, the Meeting, after detailed deliberations, recommended as follows:

- (a) all technical information, data, lists of experts, publications etc relating to SAARCSTAT and its activities may be communicated directly by the Nodal Officers on Exchange of Information and/or Focal Points on Statistics in the Member States;
- (b) copies of such communications may be sent to the respective SAARC Divisions of Ministries of Foreign/External Affairs and to SAARC Secretariat for information only.
- (c) All policy decisions and views of the Member States, on which decisions of Member States and of higher SAARC bodies are required, should invariably be conveyed to the SAARC Secretariat through the SAARC Divisions of respective Ministries of Foreign/External Affairs.
- (d) All finalised publications, prepared on the basis of inputs received from the Member States, should be sent to SAARC Secretariat and to other Member States only through the SAARC Divisions of respective Ministries of Foreign/External Affairs.
- (e) All nominations for participation in SAARCSTAT meetings/activities should be sent to SAARC Secretariat only through the SAARC Divisions of respective Ministries of Foreign/External Affairs.

New Areas:

- (a) **Sample Surveys and related issues;**
- (b) **Gender Statistics; and**
- (c) **Agricultural Statistics**

32. The Meeting held initial deliberations on the above subjects and decided to take the above as regular agenda items at its Fifth Meeting. In the meantime, it was agreed that sample surveys may include establishment surveys in addition to household surveys.

33. The Meeting decided that a set of core indicators on Economic Statistics may be identified by all the Member States keeping in view the purpose and objectives of the Working Group set up by UNSD on the subject for finalisation of a Minimum Requirement of Data Sets (MRDS) for consideration in the Fifth Meeting of SAARCSTAT. The Member States may provide information in this regard to SAARC Secretariat by August 2012 for circulation among all Member States.

Plan of Action of SAARCSTAT with timeframe

34. The Meeting reiterated that the plan of action of SAARCSTAT as recommended above may be implemented within the agreed timeframes. This would require follow-up action by the respective designated Nodal Member State.

Any other matter

35. With regard to Manual of Statistical System of SAARC Member States, the Meeting requested Nepal to prepare a draft of the same. For this purpose all Member States would convey information with regard to their statistical system to Nepal by June 2012 and Nepal would prepare the Draft Template by 31 August 2012.

36. With regard to Occupational Classification and Product Classification, Pakistan would prepare a draft Template by mid-June 2012 for consideration of the Fifth Meeting of SAARCSTAT.

37. The Meeting agreed that the title of the Sub-Group on System of National Accounts may be changed from SNA 1993 to SNA 2008.
