

The governments are more interested in publicizing the undertaking of statistical studies to demonstrate their concern, than in using their results. A great deal of data, collected at enormous cost, is thus wasted. It was felt that the governments should:

- (a) give as much attention to analysis as to data collection; and
- (b) enable universities and research institutions to use data collected by the government with the usual safeguards for confidentiality.

The participants also expressed their concern at the high and mounting costs of data collection and processing and the delays involved in the publication of results. There should be more emphasis on the use and analysis of administrative data, which are collected by different government departments in the course of their work. Furthermore, the staff should be trained to undertake mechanical processing of numerical data, and international agencies proposing new programmes should provide data processing packages, in order to reduce the time lag between data collection and its tabulation, analysis and publication.

Statistical Sovereignty

by *Dudley Seers*

This conference has underlined the great change in the atmosphere at international meetings of statisticians during the past two decades. This is partly due to changes in their composition. In the mid 1950s, the representatives of dependent countries were mostly expatriates or citizens newly appointed to their professional posts. Now they are all citizens and come with many years of experience.

There has also been a more growing awareness of the danger, in all fields, of the uncritical transfer of standards and techniques from the 'developed' countries to those with entirely different political, economic, social and administrative circumstances.

Thirdly, there have been big changes in the international scene in the 1970s, which have come to the surface in the Algiers conferences and last year's Special Session of the General Assembly. The effects of these changes, which are percolating through the UN and its agencies, can be felt in professional conferences too.

Until recently statisticians do not appear to have been as ideological as members of other professions. Is this because statistical issues seem to be entirely technical and apolitical (though any decision of a statistical office, even whether to collect a new type of data, stems from some ideological position)?

Or is it that people who embark on statistical

careers tend to be those who are uninvolved in politics? Or that the nature of their training imparts a technocratic bias? Or is the explanation that statistical offices are particularly insulated from changes in the political climate? Has a contributory reason been that statisticians do not want to lose valuable sources of patronage?

It is noteworthy that while in professions such as law and medicine, societies of social critics were founded in Britain many decades ago, only in 1975 has an association of radical statisticians been established.

At all events the conference has clearly demonstrated the sharp shift in atmosphere, which might be summed up as the recognition of the statistical sovereignty of 'developing' countries. Those of us who have enjoyed a rather exaggerated prestige as international experts will have to accept that meetings of statisticians are taking place on a much healthier basis of professional equality, and that the hearing we get will depend not so much on our status as on the merits of what we have to say.

The greatest help we can be to colleagues overseas now would be to explore ways of shoring up their independence. This depends in part on the resources at their disposal. One way of adding to these resources would be to increase technical assistance through the usual multilateral and bilateral channels. But it has often been posited at this conference that, while some experts have provided very valuable services, others have been of low professional quality, and many have just naively tried to impose the practices and conventions of their own country or their own international agency. Moreover, the more a statistical office relies on technical assistance the more it has to accept the priorities of the donors — for example, a heavier emphasis on measuring fertility than other social phenomena.

What seems to be needed is some sort of international statistical fund, under a form of political control which gives adequate weight to the priorities of 'developing' countries. Its secretariat could develop and test statistical systems and standards with the interests of these countries in view. The fund could also provide an alternative source of finance so that statistical offices could recruit additional personnel, either from inside their country or abroad. In the latter case, they could make use of the recruiting services of existing agencies if they so wished, though one possible function of a new secretariat might be to build up an international register of statisticians, with information on their academic qualifications, and (more important) on their practical experience, especially in devising statistics suitable for national needs.

The idea of such a fund may seem unrealistic. It may not, however, be so impossible at this particular time. The governments of the rich countries are looking for concessions they can make which are not too expensive. A fund of the sort indicated could be set up for a few million dollars, and it would bring some benefits to the rich countries themselves, which have interests of various kinds in improving the statistical coverage of the rest of the world.

There will shortly be a number of possibilities of setting up such a fund — the Habitat and World Employment conferences, the next session of the General Assembly and UNCTAD IV. If a fund is not practical at present, perhaps a statistical policy research centre might be set up to carry out the function of testing statistical systems and standards.

This conference has developed another line of discussion. While the standing and self-respect of statisticians would benefit from some assistance in resisting external influences — especially requests to produce estimates which lack a professionally respectable basis — they also on occasions need support against local pressures. Naturally their work will reflect the social and economic objectives of their own governments but sometimes, (see the section on national statistical offices) ministers and officials want to go further than this and to distort inconvenient data (or just suppress or delay publication).

Here the function of the international agency is positive. Internationally accepted conventions, etc., can be cited by heads of national offices as justification for publishing certain data — all the more reason to see that these conventions reflect the need of 'developing' countries. Additional external resources, such as the fund proposed above, or even just a new policy research centre, would also be helpful.

Another possible additional source of support could be to create an international association of statisticians, which would hold conferences on professional questions, explore issues such as training, and also give official statisticians some quiet help when they are under pressure, either externally or internally. An association of this kind might draw up an international charter of statistical practice stressing the statistician's responsibility to the community as a whole.

Of course too much cannot be expected of such measures. If a government is determined to convert a statistical office into a branch of its propaganda machine, it will take little heed of outside opinion. But such support might have a marginally more important effect in a more complex situation.

Provided that the development of statistical offices is not thwarted by external or internal pressures, and they devise new ways of throwing light on the various social and economic problems of their own countries, we can expect even more stimulating international conferences in the future.

APPENDICES

A. List of Participants

- Dr. J.L.S. Abbey. Chief Statistician, Central Bureau of Statistics, Accra.
- Mr. S.O. Adeyinka. Deputy Chief Statistician, Federal Office of Statistics, Lagos.
- *Mr. E. Aghazadeh. Head, Statistical Research Unit, Plan and Budget Organization, Tehran.
- *Mr. S.S. Ahluwalia. Senior Research Officer, Planning Commission, New Delhi.
- Mr. A. Aidenoff. Deputy Director, Statistical Office, United Nations, New York.
- *Mr. A.A. Alabi. Principal Planning Officer, Federal Ministry of Economic Development, Lagos.
- *Miss R. Appiah. Statistician, Census Office, Accra.
- *Mrs. P. Arfa. Statistician, Planning Organization, Tehran.
- Mr. K.M. Bashir. Bureau of Statistics, International Labour Office, Geneva.
- Mrs. N. Baster. Lecturer in Social Administration, University College of Swansea.
- Prof. W. Beckerman. Department of Political Economy, University College, London.
- Dr. M. Bienefeld. Fellow, Institute of Development Studies.
- Dr. J.G.C. Blacker. Visiting Fellow, Institute of Development Studies.
- Mr. G. Blazyca. Research Assistant, Institute of Development Studies.
- Mr. J. Boreham. Deputy Director, Central Statistical Office, London.
- Mr. Ross Bull. Associate Lecturer in Economics, Statistics and National Accounting, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.
- Dr. B.K. Roy Burman. Deputy Registrar General, Census of India, New Delhi.
- *Mr. L.A. Busby. Senior Statistician, Central Statistical Office, Trinidad.
- *Mr. P.M. Castro. Assistant Director, National Economic and Development Authority, Philippines.
- Dr. R. Chander. Chief Statistician, Department of Statistics, Kuala Lumpur.
- Mrs. B.N. Chinnappa. Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, Cambridge.
- Dr. C.U. Chiswick. Development Research Centre, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Washington.
- *Miss E. Cirak. Assistant, Department of Statistics, Hacettepe University, Ankara.
- Mr. A.V. Cock. Head, National Administrative Department of Statistics, Bogota.
- Dr. B. Dasgupta. Fellow, Institute of Development Studies.
- Prof. Karl W. Deutsch. Department of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
- Mr. L. Diop. Director of Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, Dakar.
- *Dr. H. Esmara. Director, Institute for Regional Economic Research, Andalas University, Padang.
- *Dr. K. Ewusi. Research Fellow, University of Ghana, Legon.
- *Dr. O.J. Fapohunda. Senior Research Fellow, University of Lagos.
- Dr. B. Ferran. Head of Research, Central Bank of Venezuela, Caracas.
- *Mr. R.J.L. Gaudio. Surveys Adviser, Planning and Statistical Office, Buenos Aires.
- Dr. M. Godfrey. Fellow, Institute of Development Studies.
- *Mr. M.A. Gomez Leal. General Director of Socio-Economic Analysis, National Administrative Department of Statistics, Bogota.
- *Dr. A.H.A. Hassan. Lecturer, Zagazig University, Egypt.
- Mr. R. Johnston. Statistical Office, United Nations, New York.
- Professor A.R. Jolly. Director, Institute of Development Studies.
- *Mr. R.P. Katyal. Deputy Director, Central Statistical Organization, Ministry of Planning, New Delhi.
- *Mr. A.G. Khan. Director, Bureau of Statistics, Karachi.
- *Mr. S.G. Khoo. Director of Industries Division, Department of Statistics, Kuala Lumpur.
- Mrs. K. Levitt. Associate Professor of Economics, McGill University, Montreal.
- Dr. C. Liedholm. Visiting Fellow, Institute of Development Studies.
- Mr. W. Marczewski. Principal Administrator, Economic Development and Statistics Programme, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris.
- Mr. C.M.H. Morojele. Senior Officer (Social Statistics), Statistics Division, Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome.
- *Mr. I.G. Mwanambale. Senior Statistician, Ministry of Planning and Finance, Lusaka.
- *Mr. F.F.M. Mwaselela. Principal Statistician, East African Statistical Department, Nairobi, Kenya.
- *Mr. N. Pagliccia. Teacher-researcher, Universidad de los Andes, Merida.
- Mr. G. Parniczky. Chief, Statistical Section Research Division, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Geneva.
- Mr. J.M. Pines. Visiting Fellow, Institute of Development Studies.
- Dr. Z. Popov. Institute of Economic Sciences, Belgrade.
- Mr. L. Poujadas. Director of Statistics, Central Statistical Office, Port of Spain.
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- *Mr. G.M.S. Salih. Statistician, Department of Statistics, Khartoum.

Prof. C.T. Saunders. Centre for Contemporary European Studies, University of Sussex.

Prof. Dudley Seers. Fellow, Institute of Development Studies.

*Mr. K.E.D.M. Sinada. Statistician, Department of Statistics, Khartoum.

Prof. H.W. Singer. Fellow, Institute of Development Studies.

Prof. Richard Stone. Department of Applied Economics, University of Cambridge.

*Mr. J. Wusang Tongun. Acting Senior Inspector of Co-operatives, Equatoria, Sudan.

Prof. M. Ward. University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, Roma.

*Miss K. Weerasinghe. Statistical Officer, Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, Sri Lanka.

*Dr. A.S.J.H. Young. Lecturer, Department of Mathematics, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown.

*Participants on IDS Study Seminar, 7 April - 16 May, 1975.

B. Programme of the Conference

Monday 12th May

First session

Opening remarks by Biplab Dasgupta and ten-minute introductory talks by Directors of Statistical Offices in Africa, Asia and Latin America

S.O. Adeyinka, V.R. Rao, A.V. Cock

Chairman: Dudley Seers

Rapporteur: George Blazyca

Second session

New perceptions of the problems of development

Karl W. Deutsch, Dudley Seers

Chairman: Hans Singer

Rapporteur: Charles Clift

Third session

Statistical priorities

Dudley Seers, M. Ward, A. Aidenoff

Chairman: Biplab Dasgupta

Rapporteur: George Blazyca

Tuesday 13th May

Group 1

Poverty, inequality and income distribution

Chairman: H.W. Singer

Rapporteur: G. Blazyca

Group 2

Socio-economic indicators

Chairman: N. Baster

Rapporteur: K. Ewusi

Group 3

Employment and unemployment

Chairman: M. Bienefeld

Rapporteur: R. Appiah/S. Ahluwalia

Group 4

International economic statistics

Chairman: G. Parniczky

Rapporteur: F.F.M. Mwaselela

Evening: plenary session

Lecture by Professor Richard Stone, 'An integrated system of demographic manpower and social statistics and its links with the system of national economic accounts'.

Wednesday 14th May

Group 5

National accounts

Chairman: Dudley Seers

Rapporteur: K. Levitt

Group 6

Surveys and census

Chairman: J.G.C. Blacker

Rapporteur: B.N. Chinnappa

Group 7

Organization

Chairman: R. Chander

Rapporteur: L.A. Busby/P.M. Castro

Thursday 15th May

First session

Discussion on workshop reports on employment and socio-economic indicators

Chairman: Dudley Seers

Rapporteur: Charles Clift/O.J. Fapohunda

Second session

Discussion on workshop report on international economic statistics

Chairman: J. Abbey

Rapporteur: Michael Ward

Third session

Discussion on workshop report on census and surveys

Chairman: L. Poujadas

Rapporteur: A.S. Young

Friday 16th May

First session

Discussion on workshop report on poverty, inequality and income distribution

Chairman: Richard Jolly

Rapporteur: R. Bull

Second session

Discussion on workshop report on national accounts

Chairman: V.R. Rao

Rapporteur: R.P. Katyal

Third Session

Discussion on workshop report on organization

Chairman: Biplab Dasgupta

Fourth session

Concluding session

Chairman: Dudley Seers

C. List of Conference Papers

No.	Title	Author
SC 1	Accounting and Our View of the World	D. Seers
SC 2	National Accounting System in East European Socialist Countries	Z. Popov
SC 3	A Possible Unified Core System of Social and Demographic Statistics for Analyzing, Planning and Monitoring Social Development	D. Seers
SC 4	Statistical Policy in Less Developed Countries	B.K.R. Burman
SC 5	Labour Utilization in Rural Areas: The Evidence from Village Studies	B. Dasgupta/R. Laishley/H. Lucas/ B. Mitchell
SC 6	A Typology of Village Socio-Economic Systems	B. Dasgupta
SC 7	Data-base of Indian Economy	A.P. Katyal/S.S. Ahluwalia
SC 8	A Case Study of Iran	E. Aghasadeh/P. Arfa
SC 9	The Organization of Statistics in Sudan	K.M. Sinada
SC 10	Statistical Needs in Latin America	L. Busby/R. Gaudio/A. Gomez- Leal/N. Pagliccia
SC 11	Statistical Needs and Statistical Development in the Philippines	P. Castro
SC 12	A Report on Income Distribution	K. Ewusi
SC 13	Analysis of Socio-Economic Variables as Indicators of Development	K. Ewusi
SC 14	Labour Statistics	K. Ewusi
SC 15	Organisation of Statistical Offices	L. Busby
SC 16	Study Seminar Report on "Census" Workshop	S.G. Khoo/I.G. Mwanambale
SC 17	International Trade Statistics	G. Blazyca
SC 18	Statistical Problems of Measuring Unemployment and the Informal Sector	M.A. Bienefeld/E.M. Godfrey
SC 19	Statistical Problems in Less Developed Countries (especially Latin America)	B. Ferrán
SC 20	Surveys and Census	N. Chinnappa
SC 21	Statistical Policy and Measurement Problems in Less Developed Countries	M. Ward
SC 22	Health Statistics	F. Brewis
SC 23	International and Intersectoral Statistical Development by Peripheral Economies as a Means to Exercise of Sovereignty in Relation to MNCs	R. Green
SC 24	Employment and Related Aspects in the Context of Less Developed Countries	S.S. Ahluwalia
SC 25	Employment in Agriculture in Sri Lanka and the Statistical Needs for the Measurement of Employment	K. Weerasinghe
SC 26	Social Statistics and Social Policy	R. Stone
SC 27	New Approaches to National Economic Accounts in a Caribbean Context	K. Levitt
SC 28	Report on Introductory Session on 12 May 1975	G. Blazyca
SC 29	Report on Session on Statistical Priorities on 12 May 1975	G. Blazyca
SC 30	New Perceptions of the Problem of Development	F.C. Clift
SC 31	Report of Workshop on National Accounts	A.A. Alahi
SC 32	Report of Study Seminar Workshop on Socio-Economic Indicators	K. Ewusi
SC 33	Report of the Study Seminar Workshop on Survey Methods	A.S. Young/N. Pagliccia
SC 34	Socio-Economic Indicators and National Policy: Malaysia	R. Chander
SC 36	Report of Workshop on Income Distribution	G. Blazyca
SC 37	Report of Workshop on International Economic Statistics	F.M. Mwaselela
SC 38	Report of Workshop on Socio-Economic Indicators	K. Ewusi
SC 39	Report of the Workshop on Employment and Unemployment	S. Ahluwalia/R. Appiah/C. Clift
SC 40	Report of the Workshop on Organization of Statistical Offices	L. Busby/P.M. Castro
SC 41	Report of the Workshop on Census and Surveys	B.N. Chinnappa
SC 42	Report of the Workshop on National Economic Accounting in Developing Countries	K. Levitt
SC 43	A Proposed Study of Migration	A.H.A. Hassan
SC 44	Report of plenary session on employment and unemployment	C. Clift
SC 45	Report of discussion on workshop report on socio-economic indicators in the plenary session May 15, 1975	O. Fapohunda
SC 46	Report of plenary session on International Economic Statistics	M. Ward
SC 47	Some comments on the workshop report on International Statistics	C.T. Saunders
SC 48	A note on the discussion on International Economic Statistics	A. Aidenoff
SC 49	Report of discussion on Census and Surveys in the Plenary Session on May 15th, 1975	A.S. Young
SC 50	Report of Plenary Session on National Economic Accounting in Developing Countries	R.P. Katyal
SC 51	Report of plenary session on poverty, inequality and income distribution	R. Bull

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