

ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL INSTITUTE
FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (SIAP) IN PROVIDING TRAINING ON
DEMOGRAPHY AND POPULATION CENSUS OPERATIONS

by

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This brief note provides information on the United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (known as SIAP), which is located in Tokyo, and its specific activities in relation to providing training in the area of demography and population census operations. As countries of the region embark upon preparations to conduct the next decennial Census in the year 2000, which is one of the most important national statistical undertakings, to the extent resources permit, SIAP has placed additional emphasis on demography and census operations in the curriculum of its regular courses.

SIAP, established in 1970 as the erstwhile Asian Statistical Institute, is a subsidiary body of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, also called ESCAP. Given that reliable and timely statistics are indispensable for informed and sound policy making, SIAP's role as the regional training centre to meet the statistical capability building needs of the developing Asian and Pacific countries has been well established by virtue of its long contribution to this task. In the Asia and Pacific region where most of the developing countries have limited statistical training facilities, SIAP is well placed by virtue of its mandate to impart training for official statisticians. In fact, till now, almost 7,000 statistical officials and government personnel have participated in SIAP's various training courses in Tokyo and its outreach programmes and training activities outside Japan.

While addressing training needs in the traditional areas of official statistics, SIAP's course contents in recent years are also being suitably refocussed to encompass emerging

issues of importance in the field of statistics. These include the System of National Accounts 1993, areas identified in the United Nations sponsored global summits of the 1990s, and the application of dedicated computer packages evolved in the developed countries to meet user needs and raise the data processing capabilities of the national statistical offices in the region.

As a step in this direction, and of relevance to this Conference, is that in the curriculum of SIAP's basic 6-month Group Training Course in Practical Statistics, which normally attracts participants from the national statistical offices of about 30 countries each year, topics on population and demography are taught regularly. In these areas, the course covers (i) use and applications of demographic models; (ii) estimation of basic demographic measures from census data; (iii) indirect estimation of mortality and fertility measures from incomplete data; (iv) estimation of internal migration measures from census data; (v) population estimation and projection techniques; and (vi) use of computer software packages for demographic analysis. In addition, in the module on sampling techniques and survey methodology, lecture sessions include the planning, organisation and implementation of household surveys and population censuses. The approach taken is at the general level and is to prepare junior statisticians for work relating to concepts, coverage, classification systems, collection and analysis of census data in their national statistical offices and census bureaus.

At the 2-month Group Training Course on Analysis and Interpretation of Statistics in which a particular topic or subject is focussed upon each year in order that the subject matter can be dealt with in greater depth, the core topic for 1997 was population and demography. This course is directed mainly at middle level statisticians, and in 1997 preference in participation was accorded to demographers or to those with specific responsibilities on census operations. The course

curriculum included (i) compilation of population estimates, (ii) basic mortality tables and the life tables, (iii) basic fertility measures and population reproduction, and (iv) indirect demographic estimation techniques. A notable feature of the course was the collaboration with the Program on Population, East-West Centre under which the computer software package for household projections "HOMES", developed also by the Program on Population, was introduced as a part of the curriculum to the course participants. The course also included project work on topics relating to data on population and demography of participating countries.

In the recently concluded 2-month Group Training Course in Automatic Data Processing for Trainers, a 3-week module on training in the use of the Integrated Microcomputer Processing System (IMPS) was included in the curriculum. The training was provided by an expert on the software, and with the collaboration of the U S Bureau of the Census. In their evaluation, the participants, mostly from the national statistical offices, were almost unanimous that the training received in the application of IMPS would be useful in their work. SIAP will therefore endeavour to include IMPS as a regular component in the curriculum of this annually organised course for the next few years.

In the light of the usefulness of training in IMPS to official statisticians in developing countries of the Asia and Pacific region, and keeping in view the proximity of census 2000, SIAP is negotiating collaborative partnerships with international agencies and national statistical offices in organising subregional training workshops on IMPS. This activity, commencing tentatively in the first quarter of 1999, would aim at strengthening national capabilities in data processing aspects of census operations in the region. The project, to which the Institute would offer funding from its institutional budget to supplement resources from the donor(s), will focus on those countries where computer skills

on statistical processing is a scarce resource or needs to be strengthened.

To conclude, SIAP will continue to place emphasis on human resource development, and focus its training programmes on the needs of the national statistical offices in the Asian and Pacific region so as to play a catalytic role in enabling them to acquire greater statistical capabilities. The Institute is aware that in a region of heterogeneity in the levels of development among countries, the statistical training needs are likely to shift continually as countries move to higher levels of development. At the same time, a gradual refocus in the activities of SIAP into new directions will be required in consonance with global developments in statistics.

In this setting, SIAP will strive to respond to these dynamics in double-harness. First, SIAP will seek new collaboration and cooperation arrangements with international agencies/organisations and national statistical offices of the ESCAP region. Second, SIAP will selectively identify areas for relatively greater attention in its training programmes, in order to ensure their relevance and usefulness. The Conference theme " Exploiting New Information Technology in Conducting Census Operations and Meeting User Needs" is one such area, and SIAP looks forward to the deliberations for keeping abreast with the latest developments in the conduct of census operations, as well as for sourcing training materials for SIAP training courses.
