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Revision of the mechanism for collecting and reporting information**Review of the data collection process and preparatory activities for the development of a new annual report questionnaire**

1. The present paper consists of three parts: the first part describes the process of the current international data collection system on the international drug control treaties through the Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ); the second part describes the activities that UNODC undertook from April-November 2009 to develop the draft new data collection tool. The third part covers two proposals to make the mechanism for data collection more efficient.

I. Current situation**A. Mandate**

2. Under the International Drug Control Treaties, Member States are formally required to provide annually information on the working of the international drug control treaties. For more than three decades this information had been collected annually through the Annual Reports Questionnaires (ARQ) and it had been regularly reported to the CND through two reports on the world situation with regard to drug abuse and on the world situation with regard to illicit traffic. At the United National General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) in 1998 Member States committed themselves to a series of targets to be met by the years 2003 and 2008 and agreed to monitor the progress made in the implementation of programmes with an additional questionnaire: the Biennial Reports Questionnaire (BRQ). Information collected through this questionnaire had been reported to the CND in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2008.

* UNODC/CND/EG.1/2010/1.



3. With the end of the UNGASS decade and the adoption of the new Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem in 2009, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs called for the review of the data collection tools (CND resolution 52/12) and the development of a new comprehensive tool to be submitted to the Fifty-third session of the Commission for consideration. As stated in the resolution, the new draft tool should consider that “in the Political Declaration and Plan of Action Member States committed themselves to report to the Commission on their efforts to fully implement the Political Declaration and Plan of Action”.

4. The ARQ had been revised few times after its institution. The last revision process was mandated in 2000 by CND resolution 43/1 “Streamlining the annual reports questionnaire”. Following this resolution the CND approved in 2001 a revised part II on “Extent, patterns and trends of drug abuse” (CND resolution 44/3 “Approval of the revised part II of the annual reports questionnaire”).

B. Dispatch of the ARQ

5. Each year, a note verbale, transmitting the three parts of the ARQ, including a guidance note¹ is sent on behalf of the Secretary-General to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of each Member State, primarily via the Permanent Missions accredited to the United Nations Vienna and/or New York.

6. Each ministry of foreign affairs forwards the different parts of the annual reports questionnaire to the national competent national authorities responsible for completing the respective parts of the ARQ. These commonly include ministries of health, security, justice, internal affairs, national drug authorities, or other entities. Member States may also forward these to their territories or provinces.

7. Starting in 2009, only one section within UNODC, the Statistics and Surveys Section (SASS), is responsible for the dispatching, registration and data entry operations of the ARQ.

8. Observed challenges

(a) The competent authorities to which the MoFA forwards the ARQs vary from country to country and may change over the years;

(b) The process through which the ARQ is completed also varies within that authority, with some Member States engaging in greater in-country consultation than others;

(c) It is unclear from country to country the exact nature of the agencies, individuals and data sources consulted in filling in the ARQ (there is space for the contact information for only two people on the ARQ);

¹ The instruction manual for Part II (English) is also available on-line. *GAP Toolkit Module 4- Annual Reports Questionnaire, Part II: Extent, Patterns and Trends of Drug Abuse Guide to Completion of Part II* (United Nations Publication Sales No. E.05.XI.2). There is no manual for Part III.

(d) The lack of a designated focal point in countries makes it difficult for the Secretariat to find timely answers to technical questions and to follow-up on missing questionnaires or missing parts of returned questionnaires.

C. Method of receipt

9. In general, the responses are returned either in hard copy or in electronic form via email to UNODC. However, responses have also come in person, through various field offices, direct to data entry staff, direct to analysts, to other in-house staff, and to other affiliates (e.g. INCB). This had sometimes delayed the process of data entry and analysis of some ARQs.

10. Observed challenges

The current ARQ lacks an electronic tool that can facilitate countries to provide the information directly to UNODC.

D. Timelines

11. The note verbale to the MoFA transmitting the ARQ is usually sent mid-December of the reference year, with the instruction that the ARQ, together with all relevant legislative texts and other annexes, need to be submitted to the Secretary-General before the end of March of the year after. If the government, indicated in the previous reporting cycle the competent authorities responsible to fill the different parts, those competent authorities also get an information copy of the ARQ. The Secretariat then sends reminder notifications usually at the end of July. Email or fax reminders are also sent to the last known respondents of the ARQs, with copy to permanent missions.

12. Additionally, during the last Commission on Narcotic Drugs, reminders were provided in the Member State representatives' pigeon holes along with paper copies of the ARQ in English.

13. Observed Challenges

(a) About 60 per cent of the 192 Member States (including responses from territories) have usually responded to the ARQ in a given year. Of those that respond, only 50 per cent do so by the deadline;

(b) Data provided in the ARQ, when published, represent two year old information (for example latest data that will be presented at the 2010 CND reports relate to 2008);

(c) Extensive follow-up with Member State contacts and their Permanent Missions, whether via mail, email, or in person usually yield few additional ARQs.

E. Languages

14. The ARQ (all three parts) is published officially in three languages (English, French, and Spanish). Electronic WORD versions are available online.

15. Unofficial versions in Russian and Arabic exist only as “reference” documents which means that questionnaires should be returned in only one of the three languages.

16. These documents are often returned in paper form, but increasingly in electronic format (either WORD or PDF format).

17. For the years 2008 and 2009 reminder emails and letters were translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish and sent to respective Member States, along with the ARQ in their preferred language where available.

18. *Observed challenges*

(a) Low response rates overlap with Member States where English, French, and Spanish are not commonly spoken (e.g. Near and Middle East);

(b) Some Member States may not have access to electronic formats or the Internet/ email;

(c) Responses, such as measures (e.g. weights/mass), is sometimes provided not within internationally acceptable standards. Misinterpretation in the data entry phase of measures or symbols (such as comma or dot to report thousands) do sometime cause errors in the disseminated data.

F. Integration with other regional and global data collection processes

19. Under the current data collection system, UNODC provides no formalized, routine process through which any of the following occurs:²

(a) Submissions or systematic inclusion of data reported to other regional or global organizations that collect data on drug markets;

(b) Input from academic researchers in data collection or review;

(c) Involvement of non-governmental organizations in data collection or review.

20. *Observed challenges*

(a) Some inconsistencies have been observed in data reported to different regional/international organizations. These inconsistencies can often be explained by the use of different national sources, or definitions. However, UNODC has currently limited staffing capacity to be able to review/reconcile inconsistencies.

G. Response rates, completeness and quality

21. Typically, the ability of Member States to provide information on illicit drug supply is significantly better than their ability to provide demand-related information. In terms of geographical coverage, Europe usually has the highest rate of response while Africa has the lowest.

² Some of these actions may be part of a standard process in some Member States, but current reporting does not allow for an understanding of how and if it happens.

22. The review of the latest completed process of data collection (related to the 2007 ARQ Part II and III) provides an indication of the typical response rate and timeliness of ARQ delivery.

23. UNODC sent out the questionnaire to 192 Member States. By April 2009 UNODC received 118 replies to its questionnaire on *The Extent, patterns and trends in drug use* (Part II) and 116 replies to its questionnaire on *Extent, patterns and trends in drug cultivation, manufacture and trafficking* (Part III).³ The best coverage was from countries in Europe (84 per cent of all countries in Europe returned Part II and 87 per cent Part III of the ARQ), followed by Asia (76 per cent both Demand and Supply), and the Americas (60 per cent of the countries providing the Demand, and 57 per cent the Supply ARQ). In the case of Africa, only a third of countries replied to the Supply ARQ and 38 per cent to the Demand ARQ. In the Oceania region, two countries supplied information, equivalent to 14 per cent of the countries in the region. Member States' responses to the ARQs are shown on the subsequent maps.

24. *Delivery time*

Although ARQs were to be returned by March and no later than 30 June 2008, only 49 per cent of Member States who responded, did so at least partially (i.e. Part II or Part III was returned) by that time.⁴ By 1 September 2008, 87 per cent of responding Member States that year, responded at least in part.

25. *Completeness*

The great majority of the returned questionnaires are incomplete in some parts and few are almost totally blank.

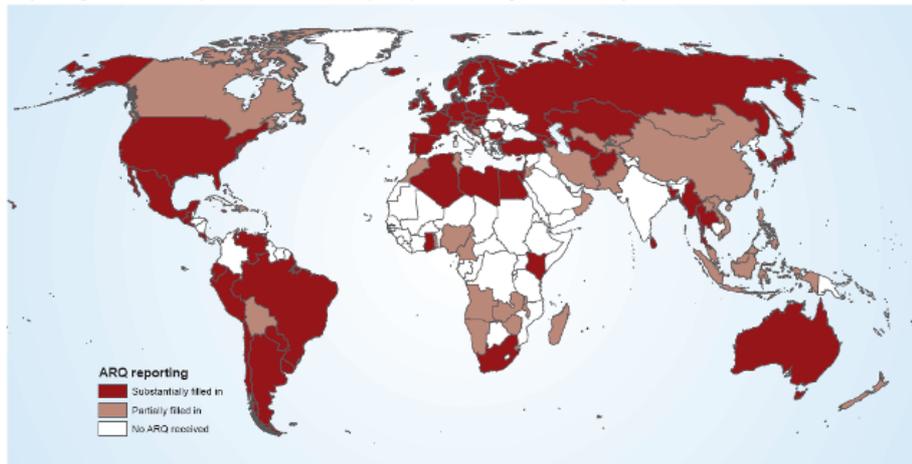
26. *Quality*

The data reported in the ARQ is not always consistent and its accuracy across countries varies.

³ From 115 and 113 Member States, respectively with additional responses from their territories.

⁴ Prior to this year Part 1 was managed by a different UNODC group, and was therefore not calculated in the response rates.

Reporting of Annual Report Questionnaires (ARQ) Part II, Drug Use, for the year 2007



Reporting of Annual Report Questionnaires (ARQ) Part III, Illicit supply of drugs, for the year 2007



Source: The 2009 World Drug Report reflecting the ARQ submitted to UNODC before May 2009.

27. Challenges

- (a) ARQs are often incomplete—even the few core questions are not always completed;
- (b) Not all Member State responses include all parts of the ARQ (I-III);
- (c) The global picture provided to CND on drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking is limited by the number of countries that provide information through the ARQ. Although UNODC makes an effort to complement the missing ARQs searching for alternative sources, it does not have the staffing capacity to systematically review sources to be able to have a truly global coverage. There is also the lack of capacity in some Member States to generate the information required in the ARQ;
- (d) Regardless of the language some experts reported the difficulty in understanding the questions in the ARQ;
- (e) There are no resources in UNODC to offer training on the ARQ to needed Member States;

(f) Lack of responses is not randomly distributed and occurs in specific geographic areas. For some regions such as the Caribbean, Middle East, and Africa very few countries have returned information in the ARQ which can allow an accurate monitoring of regional trends over the years.

H. BRQs, follow up, monitoring the 2009 Political Declaration

28. The Biennial Reports Questionnaires which was designed to monitor the implementation of the 1998 Action Plan has come to the end of their lifecycle. The information received by way of the BRQ was a rich resource for analyzing information about Member States' responses to the trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs. Accordingly Member States asked UNODC to explore ways of dovetailing the process of reviewing implementation of the 2009 Action Plan into the ARQ process (CND resolution 52/12).

29. The challenge then is to reshape the questions included in the BRQ to focus on the issues identified in the current action plan as well as to tackle the twin issues of scope and size.

II. Preparatory activities for submitting a draft of a new questionnaire

30. Between April-November 2009 UNODC undertook a series of activities in order to address the requests made by Member States in the resolution on the improvement of collection, reporting and analysis (CND resolution 52/12). In particular, UNODC (i) met with relevant regional and international organizations to discuss existing reporting procedures (paragraph 2(c) of the resolution); (ii) invited relevant regional/international organizations to submit to UNODC information on their experiences in collecting drug-related data (paragraph 4); and (iii) consulted with experts in order to draw on technical knowledge on data development and collection (paragraph 3). Based on the input of regional/international organizations and experts and on its own experience in collecting, reviewing, and analyzing for decades data on illicit drugs provided by Member States, UNODC prepared a draft of the revised ARQ.

A. Meetings with regional/international organizations

31. Between May and June 2009, UNODC visited the following organizations: European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), UNAIDS, the World Custom Organization (WCO), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Extensive internal consultations took also place between UNODC and the INCB Secretariat.

32. All consulted organizations showed a very positive attitude in strengthening the collaboration with UNODC to resolve data inconsistencies, reduce the burden on Member States, and improve the standardization of definitions and data reporting tools. Respecting the mandate of all the different agencies different approaches were

discussed. These varied from the development of data sharing agreements (so that the same information can be collected by only one organization), to informal meetings to resolve possible inconsistencies.

B. Data collected from regional/international organizations on their experiences in collecting drug-related data

33. In May-June 2009, UNODC asked different regional/international organizations to submit information on their data collection tools. The following organizations provided their input on the type of data they collect, definitions and response rates: EMCDDA, INCB, OAS, UNAIDS, WCO, and WHO.

C. Expert consultation

34. On 6-8 July 2009 UNODC convened an informal meeting of experts to provide suggestions on how to revise the ARQ as mandated by the CND resolution. Experts also discussed methods of estimating regional and global level drug production and drug use and provided comments on UNODC programmatic work to build capacity at the country level in data collection. Although the experts were selected for their technical knowledge and not for country representation, an effort was made to assure participation from all regions.

III. Proposals for making the process of collecting information from countries more efficient

A. The development of a network of national ARQ focal points

35. The process of dispatching the ARQ and collecting the information can be made more efficient if an ARQ focal point institution can be identified in each country. A unique national focal point can facilitate the interaction between UNODC and the countries at technical level and can reduce the time of transmission from/to UNODC. It can also facilitate the establishment of an international network of focal points where countries can increase interaction with their peers and receive increased support from other countries and UNODC.

36. The focal points could have the following roles:

(a) To coordinate the completion of the ARQ across different organizations/experts in the country;

(b) To submit to UNODC the completed ARQ maintaining the Permanent Missions fully informed;

(c) To liaise with UNODC on assistance needed to complete the ARQ;

(d) To participate in activities organized at international level related to the collection of data on illicit drugs.

37. The institutional focal point would be identified by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, which could remain fully informed and copied in any communication

between UNODC and the focal point. Such a system could overcome some of the challenges experienced during the years in soliciting countries to respond to the ARQ and assure a prompt clarification of issues related to data quality and availability. Such a process is in line with the practice of other organizations in the United Nations System where data providers are in direct contact with the international organization which request the data. Experience in these organizations show that a more direct contact with the data providers encourages the establishment of long-term partnerships, which increases the commitment of data providers to deliver the information in a timely manner and improve the understanding of the international organization of the data available at country level together with its strengths and limitations.

B. The development of an electronic data collection and submission system

38. As recognized in the CND resolution 52/12 (paragraph 2.f) other mechanisms for data collection developed within UNODC have shown the merit of developing a web-based data collection tool where countries can enter the information utilizing an on-line questionnaire and UNODC can import automatically the reported information into a database system. Such system would improve the quality of the reported data and would make the process of data entry, checking, and analysis more efficient.

39. With the development of the draft new ARQ UNODC is moving into this direction although resources are not currently available to fully move into a web-based tool. All four parts of the new draft are provided in Word format to facilitate the process of content finalization, however, an Excel format of Part III and Part IV has been developed and can be viewed on the Internet. Such a format features most of the characteristics of a web-questionnaire, although it still needs a transfer process, which sometimes can be time-consuming. Although this is not a web-format questionnaire, it represents an improvement from the previous PDF and Word format since it allows the following features:

- (a) Greater flexibility in accommodating country-specific practices while keeping a standard format;
- (b) Improved assistance in the provision of definitions and examples close to where the information is entered;
- (c) Flexibility in splitting the questionnaire and assigning different parts to different institutions;
- (e) Efficiency in the information transfer between the country and UNODC.

40. The development of an Excel format is the first step toward a more efficient mechanism for data collection and UNODC will extend such a format to Part I and II as well.

C. Development and implementation of a strategy to improve Member States' capacity to generate and analyze data about drugs

41. One essential element in improving the response rate and quality of ARQs is the improvement of Member States' capacity to regularly collect the needed data and to regularly complete the ARQ. Over the years UNODC has undertaken several initiatives to assist Member States in building their data collection and analysis capacity. The Global Programme on Assessing the Magnitude of Drug Abuse and the Global Assessment Programme (GAP) were two such initiatives.

42. In 2006 the GAP was evaluated and three main recommendations emerged:

(a) The influence of technical support for data collection capacities, programmes and policies is greatest when the support is directly relevant to stakeholder needs or it is provided in the context of well conceived studies with clear results and implications for polices and programmes;

(b) Advocacy work is needed to promote the use of epidemiological data and the development of enhanced monitoring systems;

(c) Where resources are limited, it is essential to capitalize on opportunities created by other capacity development and data collection initiatives.

43. A new reinvigorated effort is needed to mobilize resources and develop a new global programme to provide assistance to needed Member States, particularly in the following two areas:

1. Data collection and strengthening of monitoring capacity at country level;
2. Training on the compilation of the ARQ to national focal points and the establishment of regional/international networks where to deepen country by country engagement.

44. The network of National ARQ Focal Points could be used as an informal steering committee to refine and guide UNODCs capacity building efforts.