



**Economic Commission  
for Africa**

# **WORKSHOP**

## **Organization and Management of National Statistical Offices (NSOs)**

Emerging Data Need in the  
African Region

By

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), which was adopted about two and half years ago by the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), constitutes a specific agenda for the development of the Continent in the initial decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

2. This initiative is a successor to many others aimed at promoting economic and social development in the countries of the region. These include, inter-alia:

- The Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos;
- The United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD);
- The Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community;
- The Highly-Indebted Poor Countries' Initiative (HIPC);
- The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs);
- The Comprehensive Development Framework; and
- The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UN-DAF).

3. The new data needs emerging from the NEPAD and other recent initiatives such as the PRSPs, the HIPC and the UN-DAF, are huge and deserve close attention. Unless the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) take appropriate steps to provide them on a regular basis, these offices may gradually lose their credibility in the years to come.

4. In this context, it is obvious that national statistical priorities should be re-defined to fully take these initiatives into account. Moreover, in view of the high resource implications of the new demand for data, efforts should be made to forge strong partnerships for statistical development in individual countries and in the Continent as a whole.

## **II. STATISTICS IN AFRICA: WHERE ARE WE?**

5. The latest available information on the state of African statistical development is contained in a number of background documents considered by the Committee on development information at its second session in September

2001, including the Report on the assessment of the implementation of the AAPA\* which was endorsed by the Committee.

6. In a nutshell, the main features of African statistical development as described in the documents were as follows:

- Over the last ten years, improvements have been recorded in a number of countries in statistical legislation, organization, production and data dissemination as a result of statistical manpower development and increased computerization; however, the development and promotion of statistics have been hampered in the majority of African countries by limited financial, human and technical resources; in several cases, these have caused suspension, delays or even cancellation of important statistical activities such as censuses and sample surveys in the agricultural and other key economic sectors, the maintenance of registers of business establishments and, the adoption and implementation of new conceptual frameworks pertaining to national accounts, poverty measurement and monitoring and gender statistics; it is worth mentioning in particular that, despite its fundamental importance for development planning, monitoring and evaluation, only 24% of the countries which participated in the 2000 regional survey were complying with the conceptual framework of the 1993 System of National Accounts;
- International organizations, bilateral and multilateral donors have played an important role in funding statistical programmes and projects at regional, sub-regional and country level and also in the development of methodologies and frameworks for collecting and handling statistical data and the organization of working groups to review them; however, the volume of technical and financial assistance committed to the promotion of statistical development in Africa has diminished steadily and significantly since the early 1990s, owing to economic constraints facing developed countries; moreover, there has been a shift away from statistical capacity building support to support for those statistical activities that have immediate policy relevance;
- In sub-regional organizations (AFRISTAT, COMESA, EAC, SADC, etc), there have been increased statistical activities to assist member countries and sub-regional economic groupings to build capacity in several areas: statistical programming; national accounts; economic classifications; definitions and concepts related to the Informal Sector; short-term economic forecasting; and development of national and sub-regional databases;

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\* Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s.

- ECA has assisted in building and strengthening capacity of African countries in various areas of statistical development, through the provision of advisory services, development of concepts, definitions and classifications suited to the African region, preparation of guidelines for the formulation of national statistical development plans and group training activities. However, the volume of its technical assistance to African countries has dropped drastically, when the funding from UNDP and UNFPA for the Commission's major regional co-operation programmes, via the African Census Programme, the African Household Capability Programme, the National Accounts Capability Programme and the Statistical Training Programme, ceased in 1993. This situation worsened, when the number of professional statistician posts financed from the ECA regular budget dropped significantly in 1997. Inadequate funding also explains why the full team of regional advisers envisaged by the Strategy for the implementation of the AAPA was never put in place, despite a sharp increase in the demand for advisory services by countries due mainly to emerging issues.
- In other respects, in addition to the formulation of the AAPA and its implementation strategy, ECA took a number of steps which led, inter alia, to the establishment of the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development (CASD) in March 1992 and production of comprehensive guidelines for Statistical Needs Assessment and Strategy Development. However, it has not been able to play "best practices" role model in the areas of statistical policy co-ordination and database development. Besides, it has failed to become the "authoritative source of statistical data on African countries".
- Statistical development in Africa has also to some degree benefited from the contribution of bilateral and multilateral partners, among whom the following may be cited: France, UK, Sweden, Portugal, USA, African Development Bank (ADB), AFRISTAT, PARIS21, IMF and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)

7. In addition to responding to emerging needs, major challenges confronting African National Statistical Offices in the 2000s include:

- Creating greater awareness among planners, policy-makers, decision-makers and the general public alike about the strategic importance of statistics in promoting economic development and the welfare of people during the new millennium, since the financing of statistical activities will continue to depend, to a large extent, on such awareness;

- Playing an advocacy role to ensure that statistical data production and uses are given high priority by national governments;
- Improving the timeliness and quality of statistical information: censuses and surveys data still show serious weaknesses in quality, while their dissemination continues to witness a considerable delay in most African countries; in order to avoid their credibility being seriously eroded in the 2000s, National Statistical Offices should address this by setting up adequate data processing facilities on the one hand and, on the other, quality control mechanisms not only at the data collection stage, but also at the processing and dissemination stages, in other words, they will have to promote a culture of quality management in the various components of the national statistical system;
- Building the necessary capacity for taking full advantage of emerging information and communication technologies, at the stages of statistical data collection, storage and dissemination;
- Forging strong partnerships for statistical development at the national, sub-regional, regional and international level so as to mobilize substantial extra-budgetary resources for data collection, processing, analysis and dissemination.

### **III. PRIORITY AREAS FOR AFRICAN STATISTICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE THREE TO FIVE YEARS TO COME**

8. In conformity with the AAPA and taking new data needs into account, the programme of work of the National Statistical Offices should continue to focus on the following areas: food and agriculture; industry; human resources; transport and communications; trade and finance; environment; energy; women and development; population and development; and, the Informal Sector.

9. The list of areas of statistical activity to be considered, on priority basis, should consist of: prices and exchange rates; major production activities; employment and income; income and expenditure of central government; external trade (with emphasis on intra-African trade) and balance of payments; financial transactions; debt; national accounts; and standards of living.

10. In defining priority areas for statistical activity, National Statistical Offices should take into account data requests emanating from both internal and external users. However, it is to be noted that an external request should be examined with the greatest attention only if it conforms with national priorities.

11. In this context, it is worth mentioning that African countries should continue to pay special attention to the organization of the 2000 round of population and housing censuses, the implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts adopted about ten years ago by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the setting up of household surveys machinery and the reorganization and strengthening of civil registration.

12. One other priority area of African statistical development for the three to five years to come pertains to the organization and management of national statistical systems.

13. Indeed, the organizational structure of existing national statistical systems needs to be improved to enable them to better respond to the growing data needs. It is also important to highlight the need for African countries to prepare national statistical development programmes on a long term basis and to ensure that these are fully integrated into their national development plans, while every effort is made to promote better co-ordination and synergy among the institutions involved in statistical activities at the country level. It goes without saying that the proposed long-term (5 or 10 years) statistical development programmes should serve as a guide or framework for annual or biennial national statistical work programmes.

14. Furthermore, it is to be recalled that a budget document showing details of inputs and final outputs to be delivered by National Statistical Offices should be prepared for each financial year.

15. Finally, a thorough review of the legal texts governing the National Statistical Offices should be undertaken in a way to ensure their autonomy and guarantee their maximum efficiency.

#### **IV. EMERGING DATA NEEDS**

16. With a view to responding to data needs emerging from current international and regional initiatives aimed at promoting economic and social development in African countries (NEPAD, UNDAF, HIPC, PRSPs, etc.), National Statistical Offices should ensure henceforth a regular flow of basic and reliable statistical information and indicators on:

- Poverty and sustainable development, with emphasis on demographic, food security and agricultural indicators;
- The HIV-AIDS pandemic;
- Gender issues;

- Governance;
- Economic performance and viability;
- Private sector development;
- The Informal Sector;
- The Environment; and,
- Globalization: its dimensions and impact on African economies.

17. As indicated in the ECA document highlighting the main issues that hinder the smooth functioning of African NSOs, the countries participating in the present Workshop have reported conducting various socio-economic and demographic surveys during the past five years. These include mainly:

- Food security, health and nutrition survey,
- Annual agricultural area and crop production survey,
- Monthly retail and producer price survey,
- Household budget survey,
- Welfare/poverty monitoring survey (CWIQ),
- Living condition monitoring survey,
- Demographic and health survey,
- Demographic and education survey,
- Sexual behaviour survey,
- Large and medium scale manufacturing and electricity survey,
- Survey of construction industries,
- Small scale manufacturing survey,
- Cottage/handicraft industries survey,
- Survey of distributive trade and services,



- Informal sector survey,
- Labour force survey,
- Child labour survey, and
- Current employment and unemployment survey.

18. A number of surveys mentioned above are being carried out on periodic basis and repeated in every three or five years. On the other hand, surveys like retail and producers' prices are being carried out continuously. Moreover, in some of the participating countries, the surveys on agricultural production (area and crop production, livestock and livestock products, land utilization, farm management practices, ... etc) are being conducted on annual basis.

19. It is also worth recalling that most of the participating countries have reported undertaking either/or population and housing censuses, economic censuses/establishment surveys, or censuses in more than one sector during the past five past years.

20. In order to better respond to emerging data needs, African NSOs should expand the scope and coverage of existing data collection programmes and also launch new ones. Before embarking upon such a heavy exercise, these offices should prepare a detailed and comprehensive list of the emerging data needs (basic data, as well as indicators).

21. As mentioned earlier, in view of the high resource implications of the new demand for data, efforts should be made to forge strong partnerships for statistical development in individual African countries and in the Continent as a whole.

22. In this context, African NSOs should work out and submit specific project proposals to bilateral and multilateral donor agencies .In doing so, African NSOs should bear in mind that, following a major restructuring of UNDP and UNFPA funding policy in 1992, there has been in both institutions a significant shift away from support to regional programmes to national projects pertaining to socio-economic development and planning, including statistics. With respect to UNDP, in particular, it should be noted that national indicative planning figures (IPF) have recorded a sharp increase.

23. Moreover, African NSOs offices should endeavor to take full advantage of the existing initiatives aimed at promoting statistical development in the region. The major ones include:

- AFRISTAT's Common Minimum Statistics Programme PROSMIC (2001-2005);

- IMF Initiatives: General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) and Statistical Component of Afritacs;
- World Bank Initiatives: Live databases; Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire (CWIQ) and STATCAP;
- PARIS21;
- UNICEF Initiatives: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Child info Software;
- FAO's Regional Programmes in Agricultural Statistics: African Commission on Agricultural Statistics and FAO Regional Action Programme;
- European Union Initiatives in Statistical Training; and
- The Multilateral Co-operation Agreement in the area of statistics among Portuguese-speaking African countries and the launching of common statistical development programmes with the support of the Portuguese Government.

24. As recommended by the Committee on Development Information at its second session, emphasis should also be laid on the promotion of South-South co-operation. This should be a key element of international and regional assistance programmes in the area of statistics.

25. Furthermore, so as to enable bilateral, sub-regional, regional and multilateral institutions to improve their assistance to African countries, appropriate steps should be taken to strengthen inter-agency cooperation arrangements for statistical development, particularly within the context of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

26. In this regard, several programmatic thrusts can be envisaged in addressing the Requirements of the New Initiative for African Development (NEPAD) in terms of:

- Responding to emerging data needs;
- Organizing and managing national statistical systems;
- Co-coordinating and harmonizing policies, methodologies and concepts;
- Developing information systems and databases, and;

- Establishing functional relations and networking among partners with a view to promoting electronic connectivity and data integration.

27. Finally, for each of these programmatic thrusts, several modes of co-operation can be defined in terms of how to:

- Finance national, regional and sub-regional projects;
- Share information and experiences;
- Field short consultancy missions;
- Organize training seminars, and;
- Participate in international, regional and sub-regional co-ordination activities.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

28. Participants at the present Workshop may wish to:

- Exchange views on the emerging data needs identified in the Report;
- Work out concrete proposals on how best African should proceed to forge strong partnerships for statistical development in this context.