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**Statistical Development in Africa in the context of
the Global Statistical System**

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Abstract

In just four decades the systems of statistics in Africa went through three seismic waves. The first of these occurred immediately in the aftermath of decolonisation. During this time Africa experienced a decade of dramatic rise in the development of its systems of national statistics, particularly in the implementation of population censuses and household surveys. However, two decades later, by the 90's, Africa was dogged by dramatic declines and diminished levels of competence in its systems of statistics. Consequently, the proportion of countries that undertook a census in the 1980, 1990 and 2000 Rounds of Housing and Population Censuses in Africa, compared to those in the other regions of the world, was significantly lower. Africa undermined the cornerstone for statistical development at a critical moment of its development. Towards the end of the decade of the 90's however, statistical systems of a reasonable number of countries on the continent experienced rapid revival as democracy drove a new lease of life on the continent. By 2005 all countries on the continent were conscious of the need for a system of statistics for their sovereign, including the commitment to conduct a census. The question is whether this third wave consisting of, revival in statistics heralds new beginnings and sustained statistical systems in Africa or like its predecessor cycle, Africa will witness yet a decline. This paper suggests that to understand statistical development and influence their further development, requires that one should appreciate the interplay amongst economic performance, political stability and prospects for statistical development. In this regard the paper provides a historical perspective of how this interplay in the past worked out to the detriment of statistics and the same interplay currently and in the future seems to work to the benefit of statistics. By posing the leadership question in the arena of statistical development, culture and practice, the paper brings to the fore the need for African statisticians to identify opportunities and co-invest in statistical value creation so that the official statistics institution is enabled to harvest value appropriately and in perpetuity thereby minimise the risk of its obliteration.

1. Background

At the 39th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) in February 2008, the Commission will deliberate on statistical development in Africa. The 39th Session of the UNSC will upon receiving an African presentation on statistical development, pose an appropriate question given Africa's chequered history of statistical development and culture: Has Africa joined the world of nations characterised by sustained and robust statistical systems or is Africa just parading the flavour of the decade and will allow a repeat of the cycle as it did in the 90's? This paper prepared for the 39th Session of the UNSC highlights new directions in statistical development in Africa, and attempts to answer the questions: What makes for sustainable statistical systems? What gives confidence that the African continent this time around will strive and succeed in managing and maintaining credible statistical systems? In so doing, the paper draws on frameworks that create possibilities for leading and managing for sustainable official statistics in an African context. The paper goes further to illustrate the possibilities for Africa as a potential player and the advantage that her unique circumstances enable her to unleash her contribution to the global system, and be embraced as an integral part of driving change and adaptation in the global system of

statistics. It also allows Africa to realise that for it to be a force, it must recognise fully that playing a role in the global statistical system occurs within an ever changing and oftentimes unpredictable political, social and economic national and global environment.

This question of Africa's ability will be appropriately asked especially when all or at least the majority of the African countries are in attendance at the Commission. For the majority of African countries, this will be the first time they attend such a summit. The presence of Africa at the Commission will contrast sharply with previous Commissions where the Africa region would have had a representation of five countries. The question posed at this world stage will be very appropriate and Africa should square up to it and answer it truthfully. As the African statistics community we are grateful to the United Nations Statistics Division for giving Africa this focused attention.

2. The nature and posture of statistics in state administration

According to Spinner,¹ there are three forms of knowledge around which society organises itself. Statistics form part of this knowledge base. Knowledge can be regarded as information. In that instance, there is no need for empirical validity. This form of knowledge is given expression in drama, comedy and novels. The other form of knowledge is one which is described as understanding. The attributes of this form of knowledge are etched in its ability to advance evidence emanating from scientific observation. The third form of knowledge is that which is defined as insight. This form of knowledge draws from understanding and deliberately makes choices, hence the term evidence based decision making. The nature of statistics in state administration is that of providing evidence as the basis for decision making. The application of knowledge as understanding and its posture is that of serving as evidence that informs policy choices in the first instance, but also provides robust systems for accountability. It is against this background that we would explore the development and role of statistical infrastructure in post-colonial Africa and what prospects these institutions hold for the future.

3. Post-colonial Africa and its political forms

Post-colonial Africa went through a tumultuous phase of development. In this regard there is no doubt that this period had immense implications for the development of systems of accountability. Post-colonial Africa was birthed into a polarised world, the Cold-War. The birth attendant delivering Africa was either overtly or covertly inclined towards the East or the West. In this period of the arms race and world of super powers, the world was dominated by the west as led by the United States of America or the East as led by the USSR. This political dichotomy defined to a large extent the political determination and course that the majority of African countries would follow upon independence. As a consequence of this super power polarity and internal African strife, the politics of Africa were chequered by coups and counter coups, violence, bloodshed and instability. With the exception of those countries that got independence in the seventies, eighties and nineties namely, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa; an overwhelming majority of post-colonial African countries, suffered regime change

¹ Helmut Spinner is from University of Humanities Karlsruhe Germany

through the barrel of the gun. Botswana remains an exception to this kind of generalisation. When the eighties came to a close, the Berlin wall collapsed, and this gave way to a uni-polar world dominated by the United States of America because it remained as the only super power. Accompanying these changes in the balance of forces, were large scale global movements that promoted the pre-eminence of multilateralism, development agenda and sought more transparency and democracy. The Human Development Index was born, so were the Millennium Development Goals subsequently, Climate change and Global Warming came to be important global agenda issues, World Summit for Sustainable Development became yet another global consideration. During this period of promoting multilateralism, South Africa notably finally won its liberation through political negotiations in 1994 and several African countries went through elections and promoted parliamentary democracies. The nineties ushered a new and different wave of political modes of existence vis-à-vis the militaristic and violent formations that existed in the sixties, seventies and eighties in Africa. Forms of government, dramatically influences the community of practice in official statistics. With the emergence of peace and democracy, there was also evidence that statistical practice was enabled. Those in power and in opposition soon realised that they as leadership and their respective followers, require a mechanism for holding one another to account. In military or dictatorial regimes, statistics may not and could not thrive because they are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for decision making. Competence in official statistics had been built in countries such as Kenya which was also already building competence in geography in the eighties. Uganda was also assisted by the existence of the Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (ISAE) where a good number of staff members in official statistics on and for the continent were trained. But with the advent of political turmoil of the seventies, Uganda had the cream of its professionals fleeing the country and subsequently there was very little statistics to talk of by the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties. South Africa troubled by apartheid, did not have a comprehensive statistical programme, although it covered economic statistics for an increasingly strong economy. By 1994, the system of statistics in South Africa had lost all credibility and this was driven by the disdain for apartheid and the fact that the political practice undermined fundamental principles of official statistics.

4. Building statistical infrastructure in post-colonial Africa

Africa as an agenda at the Commission is a result of cumulative initiatives directed at statistical development on the continent over the last four decades. This is from the time Africa began the decolonisation journey. Towards the end of the sixties as Africa concluded her decolonisation, she was showing an enormous appetite for statistical development and this became evident through the seventies and eighties. In this time Africa immersed herself in shaping systems of statistics domestically and successfully brought some influence internationally. The statistical agenda of Africa was characterised by an attempt by African countries to manage their first post colonial censuses. However, at the same time, in particular until the close of the eighties, Africa was also indulging in unprecedented political strife marked by coups and counter coups. The temporal story of Africa is that the statistical waves were marked by a rise, demise

and a rise. The years of dramatic manifestation of these changes were 1965 to 1985, 1985 to 1997 and 1998 to the present time respectively. The two decades spanning 1965 to 1985 saw a collective of initiatives aimed at the establishment of statistical infrastructure on the continent. The building of statistical infrastructure consisted of establishing the post colonial statistics office and some regulatory basis for the existence of the organisation, the establishment of regional training institutes for the newly independent states, the creation and management of a work programme and the establishment of regional competence to support statistical development. The second wave consists of the destruction of the statistical infrastructure and, in significant instances leading to its total decay at country and regional level. The third period of the late nineties and the beginning of the 21st century consists of Africa making rapid gains in the revival and implementation of more sustainable strategies to statistical development.

The establishment of statistical infrastructure in Africa appears to have focused on four important pillars. Firstly it was the establishment of the statistics offices, second the establishment of the training institutions that would supply the requisite manpower for these offices, third a work programme which these offices had to execute and fourth a statistical infrastructure at the continental level to support country initiatives.

4.1 Establishment of a statistics office

After independence all African countries either established a new or retained a statistics office as part of an institution of government. One form or the other of legislation or regulation governed these offices. However, none of these offices were sufficiently senior or autonomous to manage in an environment where knowledge is seen to be understanding. They primarily served the ministry to which they reported or the government of the day in ways that were exclusive to their immediate bosses. Although their role could be seen as providing the necessary information to the state, but the way they were structured and organised lent the African statistics offices to being stifled from playing such a role because of where they located in the government machinery and how they conducted business.

4.2 Establishment of training institutions

Towards the end of the sixties, Africa witnessed the establishment of United Nations supported training institutions which aimed at addressing Africa's human resources requirements in the field of statistics and population studies. The Statistical Training Programme in Africa (STPA), focused on African Population Programme and National Accounts Programme. For instance, the Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (ISAE), at Makerere University, the East Africa Statistics Training Centre (EASTC) in Tanzania, the Regional Institute for Population Studies at the University of Ghana and the Population Studies Institute located in Egypt are some of the regional training initiatives started then in Anglophone and Arab speaking Africa. In Francophone Africa IFORD, the statistics training centres in Rwanda and Cameroon constituted some of the initiatives that aimed at supplying professionals that would run these institutions. Unfortunately these institutions produced a cadre of individual professionals and not a machinery and

critical mass for building institutions such as a culture for statistical thinking and reasoning that would extend well beyond the individual statistician.

4.3 Developing a work programme

The first two post-colonial decades in Africa, namely the sixties and seventies saw African statistics offices making their first attempt at managing a post colonial census. These censuses were largely supported by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). The census became the initiation school for any statistics office. This is because a census of the population exposes a statistics agency to five most critical leadership and management areas with intensity not witnessed in any area of statistical production or more generally of leadership and or management even outside a statistical system. These areas are, leading and managing intellectually, technologically, logistically, politically and administratively. These five areas require simultaneous leadership and management intensity if results are to be obtained and impacts to be felt. Following on capability to run a census, in the 70's and early part of the 80's, there had been a number of statistical development initiatives that have worked and in particular in 1978. Under the leadership of the Economic Commission for Africa, African countries started the African Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP), which played a leading role in building national capacities in participating African countries. These countries rapidly built capability to collect, through a multi-purpose integrated programme of household surveys, integrated and inter-disciplinary data on a continuing basis and on a wide spectrum of subjects. Following its success in Africa, this programme was extended to other regions of the world. At this global level of the United Nations, it became known as the UN National Household Survey Capability Programme with the African programme as a regional component. These excellent strides that Africa made were undermined by the general lack of political leadership on the continent and the then general ignorance, disdain for and political control of statistics. If they were important they had to be state managed and controlled and be used for command and control of citizenry. To this day some countries fail to make their data accessible to their citizens and the world.

4.4 Economic Commission for Africa

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) this year celebrates its 50th anniversary. The jubilee should be celebrated because we can reflect proudly on the highs of this institution in relation to Africa's statistical development. We will also be able to commiserate some of the bad and uninformed decisions that in part contributed to the decimation of statistical development on the continent. Thirty years ago, UNECA provided an invaluable service to member states in various areas of national development including statistics. It may be recalled that until mid-1990s, UNECA had a big and vibrant Statistics Division. At its peak, the Division had a staff complement of 28 professionals. During the period 1970-93, UNECA launched five regional technical assistance programmes with the support of bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies. These programmes had great impact on the development process of African

statistics. The statistics division during this time also made invaluable contribution to the development of the global statistical system.

Kiregyera² has this to say about UNECA: In 1978, UNECA started the African Household Survey Capability Programme, which played a leading role in building national capacities in participating African countries to collect, through a multi-purpose integrated programme of household surveys, integrated and inter-disciplinary data on a continuing basis and on a wide spectrum of subjects. Following its success in Africa, this programme was extended to other regions of the world and established at global level as the United Nations National Household Survey Capability Programme with the African programme as a regional component. Second, much of what is now promoted internationally as the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) has its origin in the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in the 1990s. As part of the implementation strategy for the Addis Ababa Plan of Action, UNECA produced comprehensive Guidelines for Needs Assessment and Strategy Development (NASD) detailing the organization of NASD, its outputs and follow-up actions. These were “**glorious days**”. Those days disappeared and now they are being resuscitated.

5. Economic performance and statistics in Africa

In the late sixties and early seventies, some of the countries such as Nigeria were at the same state of development as South Korea, and Nigeria even enjoyed better per capita income compared to Korea then. However, by the late seventies through eighties, economic management in the majority of African countries had been so worrisome that by the mid-nineties, the IMF and World Bank prescribed the structural adjustment programmes as the remedy for Africa’s woes. Many African countries took to it but with even more disastrous consequences and at times losses politically. It is more recently that many of the so called highly indebted and poor countries (HIPC) have been relieved of debt. The link between debt relief and the development of statistical infrastructure on the African continent is an important one. There is strong evidence to suggest that the collapse of economies in Africa correlated very strongly with the collapse and or infirmity of their statistics systems. The link in this regard may by and large imply causality between the two phenomena of statistical development and economic performance.

6. Political strife and statistics in Africa

Globally, nowhere has the coexistence of conflict, war, human rights abuse and lack of or absence of statistics, been as manifest as has been in Africa. The correlation appears to be so strong that it suggests some levels of causality that would merit scientific enquiry. The question that this brings up in Africa is whether statistical development can survive in times of conflict? Or given that statistics thrive in democracies, can they play a catalytic role towards creating democracies or are they idle beneficiaries of democracy? If the latter is true then statistics should bask in the euphoria of the interest that has been

² Kiregyera is the first director of the newly created African Centre for Statistics at the ECA. He served as a consultant for the NSDS in the continent and was Chair of the Board of Directors of UBOS

thrust upon the institution, and enjoy the warmth whilst it lasts until the painful fate settles in. If this assumption is not true, the question is what strategies driven largely by professional interest should statisticians immerse themselves in, in defence of democracy and at the same time the institution statistics itself? What is the role of the fundamental principles of official statistics and legislation in the practice of official statistics? Further the question is why now are the signs suggesting that statistics will thrive and what needs to be done to engage a path that will be almost impossible to reverse? How do statistician and the body polity of users lock-in value in perpetuity?

7. Economy, politics and statistics (The political economy of statistics)

We have seen that immediately after independence the necessary institutions for statistical development on the continent were put in place. What is also clear is that during that period of close to thirty years, military coups and dictatorships were the order of the day on the African political scene. Furthermore dismal economic performance sat side by side with this untenable political situation. Both the social and economic conditions on the continent were becoming worse and service delivery was rapidly declining. Price controls and barriers to trade led to shortages of goods and services and these induced inflationary pressures and citizens continued to suffer dramatic declines in their standard of living. So despite the statistical institutions being put in place, the training institutes being established and a work programme being implemented, the political and economic developments completely overwhelmed and undermined statistical institutions. Statistics did not appear to be useful or contribute significantly in the arena of decision making. They became supply driven goods without a corresponding eager market demanding to make use of such products and services. For instance, in the case of Kenya, the Census of the decade of the 90's became a subject of political ridicule whilst the results of the Census from Nigeria were not accepted until eight years later, only in 1998. Of what value would a census accepted so late be to decision making both in Nigeria and Kenya? In South Africa, as a consequence of its chequered apartheid past, the results of its partial census of 1991 could not be relied upon for the course of development action of the new government which was ushered in 1994. South Africa has continued to find difficulty in building trust in official statistics as a consequence of this challenging legacy. The statistics terrain is characterised by fragmentation and production processes that are less organised. However, over time these problems are being addressed as will be elaborated upon in the paragraphs that focus on South Africa.

Shortly after independence, Africa was destabilised politically. Fervent attempts at statistical development sat side by side with successful coups de tat and regime changes. This resulted in a situation where the gains that Africa began with during the rising wave of statistical development in the ten years from mid point of the sixties getting lost as Africa soon presided over systems that undermined this positive development and over time, the system had been so weakened that the decay in statistical infrastructure became very rapid. This was especially so during the period from around 1985 to 1995. By 1997, some statistical practices, offices and infrastructure were decadent and in total disarray.

8. Post 1995 statistical development in Africa

At the beginning of the decade of the nineties, the Addis Ababa Plan of Action embraced the development of statistics as a core ingredient for Africa's development. Although sadly abandoned then and left to gather dust, this plan of action for statistical development has been resuscitated as a blue print for guiding statistical development on the continent.

The post 95 statistical development in Africa can be traced and correlated with the political stability that emerged from the conflict of the seventies and eighties and the frequency with which democratic governments were elected to power. The conditions of peace gave rise to the demand for statistics. In fact on the continent a key output of statistics, namely a census of the population, has become a pre-condition for a democratic election.

8.1 Broad based initiatives

The post 95 statistical development experiences in Africa have now been supported by a series of purposeful country led or supported initiatives that started from about 1999. These have built on the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for statistics. Here are some of those initiatives that are part of the new wave of programmes and activities that have promoted statistical development in Africa. Ajayi³ notes that there are several and some of these initiatives include the establishment of PARIS21 Consortium; the promotion of General Data Dissemination Standards (GDDS) including the accompanying Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF); the creation of a strong statistical function at African Development Bank (AfDB) and the preparation and implementation of the ICP-Africa along with its Statistical Capacity Building Programme; the preparation of the Reference Regional Strategic Framework and the attendant National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS). With the creation of ASSD, the Friends of ECA was also established to take care of the ASSD objectives and to provide support to the ECA as it establishes a credible statistics function. Today African Centre for Statistics at UNECA is reality. The creation of AFRISTAT as a centre of guidance and harmonisation for statistical development has provided an invaluable platform for predominantly Francophone Africa. The IMF through its Regional Technical Assistance Centres (AFRITAC) has provided support for the GDDS. The UN Development Account came on stream for the various Regions of Africa.

There are other Statistical Development Programmes at some of the Sub-Regional Communities such as SADC's EU supported Training Programme, a model syllabus has been established for SADC. ECOWAS harmonisation of statistics in the sub-region has also been supported. There are other initiatives on the continent such as the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (MAPS), the creation of the Forum for Africa Statistical Development(FASDEV) with its earlier forerunner, the Coordinating Committee for African Statistical Development(CASD) that have been very active in the development of

³ Ajayi is former Chief Statistician for Nigeria and currently a consultant on statistical development in africa

several initiatives. As we inaugurate StatCom Africa as a pinnacle body that will deliberate in the first instance professional issues relating to official statistics on the continent, and the management and leadership concerns for statistics as well, we note with satisfaction the initiative for the African Statistical Charter which is being co-ordinated by the African Union Commission.

8.2 PARIS21 comes on the scene

Partnership in statistics for development in the 21st Century was established in 1999 as an international partnership of policy makers, analysts and statisticians. The inaugural meeting was held in Paris and was arranged by the UNSD, OECD, EU, World Bank and IMF. PARIS21 has continued to serve as a formidable force for renewal of official statistics particularly in those parts of the globe that are developing. The key to success in any process is to realise that renewal is very important. PARIS21 filled a vacuum which official statistics had left to its own devices. The UN Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics were adopted, however, there were no practical guidelines for their application. These fundamental principles are very critical for assisting Africa to succeed in its endeavour of getting statistics that are of quality and assist in policy making. PARIS21 brought about mechanisms of advocacy through which the Fundamental Principles can be propagated. In that way PARIS21 created conditions for renewal of the statistics systems.

8.3 Catalytic role of censuses for democracy in post 1995 Africa

In many countries in Africa today, the desire to have a census is unprecedented and it is driven often times by the enthusiasm of the political authorities. The experience of Kenya and Nigeria regarding the results of their 90s round of population censuses appear to be experiences of the past and are less likely to be repeated as censuses have become currency for democratic rule. Take for instance the 2006 Census of Nigeria. This census was greeted with tremendous zeal and appreciation and is miles apart from its counterpart census of the nineties. What used to be lacklustre statistics offices yesterday are vibrant organisations that are pushed by political pressure to provide information for elections and democracy. Another important example illustrating the growing importance of statistics is the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of the Sudan signed in 2005, (a constitutional matter), which is anchored on running a successful census of the population and this census is scheduled for this year, *en shaala*. The office of statistics of Malawi has had to push their date of the census forward by three months to fit in with the political agenda of elections in that country scheduled for 2009. Increasingly applications of official statistics in the policy arena are becoming visible and statisticians have to live up to this expectation without fear, favour or prejudice.

To my knowledge, in apartheid South Africa, there has been no occasion where a President launched census results. Upon receiving the results of the census of 1996, the former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela on launching the results said that now

we know how many of us are in the country and how we can advance our democracy through “a better life for all commitment.”⁴

In the 1999 Commission there was discussion on the 2000 Round of population censuses and the regional collaboration efforts in SADC towards this goal were given attention. Guest Charumbira, the Director of Statistics in Botswana and I from Statistics South Africa had donor discussions with the UNFPA in particular as regards the 2000 round of censuses. I had the humbling responsibility of presenting the position of the SADC project on the 2000 round of censuses and progress made thus far in terms of agreed upon common questions and harmonised instruments in SADC. A letter approving the project in principle was presented to the delight of the two SADC delegates. As a consequence of the approval of the project, four training workshops involving between 14 and 28 SADC delegates, at a time, were held in 1999, with one on census cartography starting from 10th May 99.

This is how the SADC led, UNSD supported and UNFPA funded project on the SADC Millennium Censuses was initiated and this yielded very positive results. Emanating from this initiative was the publication of the Demography of South Africa in 2005 in collaboration with the African Census Analysis Project (ACAP) based at the University of Pennsylvania. A research and an ambitious publishing agenda under what is now known as the Demography of Africa Series has now been launched and this seeks to surface African scholarship and analytical capability.

Following on this initiative, in 2006 the UNSD further raised resources from the Development Account to fund south-south collaboration amongst SADC member states. An exchange programme is now running with staff members undertaking study tours to learn about census operations, implementation of geographic information systems and data processing in the sub-region. From 1999 to 2007 the continent has witnessed serious commitment to taking stock of the population on the continent.

8.4 Mozambique and international funding agencies

In 1999 I was invited by the President of the Statistics Office Mozambique, Joao Loureiro, to witness the launching of their 1997 Population Census results. It was at this occasion that I took discussions with the former President of Mozambique, His Excellency Dr Chissano who was the guest of honour receiving and launching the results. He captures what he perceived as the political ignorance he had for official statistics, the hard lessons he learnt and how he committed his country to the use and application of evidence for policy work. He very frankly told me of his frightening experience with the World Bank and IMF when he sought development finance there. After eating a sumptuous meal and exchanging pleasantries, he was convinced he was going to get the resources he needed. He thought now the time was for exchange of documents to sign and he then could head to Mozambique. Unfortunately that was the beginning of his woes, it was not to be. He was interrogated by both institutions about the size of the

⁴ This is a manifesto of the African National Congress and the President of the ruling party referred to it in relation to what the census results suggested.

Mozambique economy, price levels and changes, sectors and their performance and the population size, structure and its attributes. He got a barrage of questions to which he had no answers. By the time he left the United States, he only had questions in his briefcase and no agreements. He had then at that point resolved that he was going to create the hen that produces these golden eggs called statistics.

Statistical development in Mozambique makes for an interesting case study on the continent. It is probably the only agency headed by a civil servant with the rank of a Deputy Minister on the continent. He informed me about this as he was launching the population results of the 1997 Census of Mozambique to which I was invited. The authority and visibility of the statistics system in Mozambique was prompted by asking the right questions to the appropriate authority and this was followed by ushering the right leadership to lead and manage the organisation.

8.5 International Comparisons Programme Africa (ICP Africa) and Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs)

As Africa concludes its part of the International Comparisons Programme Africa in 2007, I fondly remember as I sat for the first time at the UNSC in 1999 and listened attentively on the debates on this issue. A controversial issue presented by StatCan was with regard to the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) and its application. A matter raised in respect of the PPP was whether in its present form it is a useful measure and secondly, what are the consequences and implications of its use on the reputation of statistical agencies. In particular, the question PPP as an indicator begged was, why its dissemination, with the associated differences it depicts amongst countries, go unnoticed, fail to arouse interest amongst countries and appears to be of no consequence? While quite remarkably, on the other hand, any shifts in the CPI and other indicators have always attracted attention. In this regard would it be necessary to publish the PPP as an indicator and better still would it be necessary to continue collecting information for purposes of the PPP.

The balance of debate on this issue was that, that there was need to derive a statistical measure that would facilitate comparison across countries in a credible manner was not debatable. (In fact, there is growing concern amongst the community of government statisticians to the populist use of the McDonald price schedules as the basis for comparisons amongst countries). However, PPP as currently constructed is very debatable as it has the potential of tarnishing the quality of work statistical agencies are involved in. There is therefore need to improve the quality of the information that feeds into the PPP to make it a credible measure. For as long as it is not credible, which appears to be the case, it is unwise to venture into publishing it as it jeopardised the standing of statistical agencies was the conclusion of the paper. In response to this important concerns and indeed taking full note that PPPs are important for comparing and communicating facts about the world we live in, the AfDB created a strong statistical function initially for purposes of managing the implementation of the ICP- Africa. In turn this has provided impetus for Statistical Capacity building and Statistical Development in Africa. About 48 countries out of 53 participated in this arduous programme which involved hands-on training in data collection, processing and analysis.

As a result of this effort the national accounts series in the African countries have improved and for the first time, aggregation of the country data across Africa has been possible. One of the most difficult steps to enable policy on what integration involves has been done and the continent will have a better base on which to decide about the next steps on regional integration.

Whilst in 1999 this was seen as an impossible project, eight years later in 2007, forty eight countries on the continent had participated successfully in ICP Africa and for the first time countries in Africa can compare one against the other. The seeds for regional integration have been sown.

8.6 The General Data Dissemination Standards (GDDS) and the Special Data Dissemination Standards (SDDS)

Associated with this area of debate was a policy position on the effects of statistical needs of supra-national organisations on national statistical offices especially, the special data dissemination standards, (SDDS). This was as regards the negotiations that the supra-national organisations, in particular the IMF, engage in with national governments on what statistics have to be collected. These collections often become prescribed as mandatory collections without adequate involvement with statistical agencies, the SDDS is a case in point. The reaction to this situation differed with the more statistically developed agencies largely opposed to the stipulations that were arrived at, while the less statistically sophisticated countries, while not necessarily preferring the arrangement, to the extent that it did not involve them, however still argued in its favour. The position of the IMF on the matter was less rigid and they argued that in their review they have been persuaded not to strike the countries off their lists for non-compliance but rather to indicate which countries do not comply.

South Africa has benefited greatly by volunteering itself to be part of the SDDS club. It was not an easy decision as it imposed undue pressure and unreasonable timeframes which often times led us into risks of making mistakes, which indeed we committed. Looking back ten years later the decision to adopt the SDDS, have improved the performance standards of the organisation and has defined modalities of interactions with others.

Eight years later, it is clear that although the perception and reality is that the international agencies can be unreasonably demanding and onerous from the perspective of the countries, the requirements can also be very useful. In fact a number of requirements they make generally promote transparency and they bring about general awareness that political leadership requires.

8.7 The making of the Africa Symposia for Statistical Development (ASSD)

By 2001, worried about the soaring cost of undertaking a census, jointly with UNFPA, UNSD and PARIS21, Statistics South Africa hosted a conference on reducing the costs of a census. This well attended conference was followed by another conference in 2003

focusing on making value visible. This was also held by Statistics South Africa. The agenda for ensuring that Africa counts was emerging and the stage was set for contributing significantly in the system of global statistics one surmised. However, faced with the reality of objective contribution and dogged by difficulties of participating and being an integral part of the global system of statistics, Africa could not pronounce on the Principles and Recommendations of the 2010 Round of Housing and Population Census. This was despite the fact that the post 1995 period has demonstrated that it holds promise for Africa. Another difficulty that became apparent was how Africa fared with the implementation of measurement of progress and providing reports on achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The Friends of the Chair prepared a report for the Chair of the UNSC and requested that the matter be raised at the UN General Assembly in order that statistical problems of Africa can be attended to in a more aggressive manner than hitherto.

Following a stakeholder meeting in Younde, Cameroun for raising awareness for the 2010 Round of Censuses and against the backdrop that Africa had no plans for contributing in the Principles and Recommendations of the 2010 Round of Housing and Population Censuses, it became important that Africa address these matters. Statistics South Africa was asked by countries to convene a meeting and address the issues of Principles and Recommendations for the 2010 Round of Censuses. The session was successfully convened and subsequently a decision was made that countries will take turns in hosting what then became the African Symposium for Statistical Development (ASSD). This will be a fifty three year journey, with an African country hosting each year. The first few years of the ASSD will focus on censuses and ensure that assistance is provided for countries emerging out of conflict as well as highlighting the peace mission of censuses. Thus far three such ASSDs have been held in Cape Town - South Africa, Kigali – Rwanda and Accra – Ghana. The fourth ASSD is aimed for Luanda - Angola in January 2009. The ASSD is a country led programme that deals with issues of content and advocacy, but more specifically ensuring that Africa gets counted in the 2010 Round of Censuses. Furthermore the commitment is to assist countries emerging out of conflict in taking a census in the 2010 Round. Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, Eritrea, Angola and the DRC are some of the countries on the continent on the priority list of the ASSD.

9. Re-establishing a statistics unit at the ECA

As part of the Programme of Action of the ASSD, was the priority of re-establishing a fully fledged statistics entity at the ECA that would provide leadership on the continent. When Mr. Abdoulie Janneh took up his responsibilities as the Executive Secretary of the UNECA in 2005, his first trip on Statistics was to Cape Town where the first ASSD was held. Subsequently he was able to present a case for statistics at the ECA to the 38th Session of the Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. When he got to the ECA he found that not only was the Statistics Division no more but also the statistics function at UNECA had been badly degraded. Many statistics posts had been taken up by other professions, experienced statisticians had been out-posted to sub-regional organizations (SROs) or to other divisions and there was no more “critical mass” of statisticians at UNECA secretariat

with needed resources dedicated to implementation of a coherent statistical programme in support of statistical development in Africa.

The leadership at the ECA realized early on that there cannot be development in Africa without statistical development, for we know, that statistics are part of the enabling environment for national and international development. The leadership appreciated that statistics cannot be reduced to a technical issue but; it is about development. It was therefore clear that UNECA needed a credible country statistics for its work on policy analysis and advice to member states. Taking advantage of the repositioning of the UNECA to serve Africa better, the leadership caused knowledge management, statistics and statistical development to become priority sub-programmes of the Commission. An African Centre for Statistics (ACS) with division status was created to implement the statistics sub-programme.

10. Content of statistical programme in Africa

Africa is part of the global economy and development. She gets impacted by developments elsewhere, sometimes positively and other times, and in fact most of the times adversely. Can and will Africa participate both in the dialogue, diagnostics and solutions of problems of global warming amongst other challenges facing the world? Will the African system of statistics be part of the global system that interrogates world issues and inform on them. African participation can be recognised when it develops its capability in scientific enquiry which knowledge systems of statistics demand. Africa has unique requirements that need unique techniques for addressing them. For instance African economic markets are driven largely by massive informal sector and agricultural production. What is the professional contribution that Africa brings to the global system in these specific areas of measurement? Africa has nomadic populations that coexists with rapid modernisation, what are the new methodological considerations for accounting for nomads in the new environment. South Africa poses an interesting problem for censuses. Its modern economy presupposes a society that is fully modern and integrated in both the social and economic system of production, but apartheid contradictions made this coherence of systems impossible. Apartheid policy has created a space economy and social spaces that are disparate and their lack of congruence poses an additional burden for achieving an accurate count in a census of the population. What scientific initiatives can South Africa bring to the world for achieving an accurate census under these circumstances?

An important objective of the census in an African setting has been that of the role of censuses in peace making. This is a uniquely African attribute, which is overtly pronounced upon in census justification. Achievement of peace is a political process and running a census is a scientific process. What does Africa have to say about optimisation of the scientific method in the face of political conflict? How do these two objectives conflate and possibly undermine the scientific method? Africa has had to make strategic and technical decisions when confronted with restive political situations. What are the estimation procedures for measurement where political objectives have to be mitigated?

The unique social and political circumstances in Africa provide fertile ground for new research initiatives that require managing and applying science in an environment that is different from another economic and social setting. This is the opportunity Africa has to contribute to scientific enquiry.

Challenges of measurement on the continent are global warming and climate change, measuring employment, measuring life expectancy and undertaking population projections in a changed mortality regime. Whilst issues of capacity are important, Africa has sufficient number of questions through whose answers Africa can and should capacitate her own understanding of the environment within which she operates.

11. Politics, democracy and statistics

The practice of political democracy as it has been taught and practised in the other parts of the world is a more recent phenomenon in Africa. This is largely with the exception of Botswana, a country that has enjoyed stability and regular ballot box based elections, longest in its post colonial era. Recent as it appears to be, there are dangers that this practice can be undermined because of the fragile nature of the institutions of democracy on the continent and this includes statistics. Countries on the continent, even after democratic elections, plunge into crisis. In fact in instances the populace is more worried by the aftermath of an election. The case of Lesotho in 1998 and in 2005 and Kenya after its elections towards the end of 2007 illustrate the fragile nature of the understanding and practice of democracy on the continent. Political instability undermines institutions of democracy and replaces them with a sub-culture of war and instability. As an institution, statistics thrives under conditions of peace. So until peace prevails, statistics are always in danger of being undermined. Africa albeit with fragile institutions susceptible to instability, has got respite and a moment of peace. The question then is, given the respite provided by recent peace to institutions such as statistics, to what good use do these institutions put the respite. With peace the demand for statistics become unprecedented and the coincidence of peace, democratic rule and information technology create conditions that are ripe for statistical practice.

The question is whether statisticians are consciously aware of under what conditions statistics thrive and how does the leadership identify the opportunity for action, and how the leadership embrace a period that requires them to thrust themselves into action without compromising their professional duty of acting fairly, without fear, favour or prejudice.

12. Democracy, information technology and statistics

Peace and democracy imply freedom of speech and broad participation in the public domain in the market of knowledge and ideas. Are statistics agencies of the continent ready to compete and lead in the knowledge market? Do they have what it takes to conduct their business in this market that is also fervently driven by self interest? At the beginning of the year 2008, Statistics South Africa had a rude call. In October 2007, Statistics South Africa released the results of a Community Survey, a large scale survey

of 285 000 households. The survey procedure was a multi-stage probability sample, substantively proportionate to size, with the exception of one province where the sample was much larger, to allow for reasonable sub-provincial estimates. I had written several articles to inform the public of this survey, the preparations, the launch of field work and forewarning on when the results will be released. On the 24th of October I released the results to the public in a well attended launch at Cabinet in Cape Town and this was in the presence of the media. The Chair of Statistics Council also released his statement, which included warning signs, and a statement affirming that they as Council advised the Minister and the Statistician-General to release the results. Press releases followed and analytical commentary as well was included. On the 26th of October the President of the country and of the ruling party through his Friday newsletter, ANC today, having received the results encouraged the public to study them and went further to say that in his own reading the results confirm that the commitments the government made on a better life for all are being met. This occurred at the time of run-up to a party conference that would also elect new party leadership. The contest was extensively published in the press, the incumbent president lost to his deputy.

On the 8th of January 2008 Karyn Maughn, a journalist of The Star published front page headline: **R600 million state survey bungle**,⁵ that created a crisis for the organisation, by alleging, although correctly, that the Statistics Council set warning signs on the results of a large scale survey, she decided deliberately or otherwise not to quote the full statement of Council thereby deliberately and sensationally misleading public opinion. By truncating the statement and pouring vile in the public domain, the organisation had to fight from the back foot. We dealt with this matter in the media and are following up with addresses to different political formations. In a separate article I have had this to say in response to the article: *This abstract which I wrote after finishing this document tends to suggest that what this treatise is about is in the first instance the possibilities of how democratic societies conduct their business in an information era and secondly it asserts that democratic societies are not necessarily information societies. The article led us in the path of what are the forms of misinformation as influenced by information technology platforms. It suggests that these platforms by themselves create conditions for the transition from a democratic society to an information society. The paper suggests that whilst information availability and freedom of information is a central pillar of democracy, this freedom and possibly information technology platforms create conditions for post democracy societies, which indeed are information societies and not necessarily democratic. So the illusion of imagining that when we become an information society we will be more democratic is just but a comfortable illusion. Democratic management practices as they exist may not fit this new environment of information societies. Can democracy be protected in an information society where accountability is so diluted? Are we about to witness the biblical tower of Babel or not? I believe that this is one of the big challenges of leadership in the 21st Century.*⁶

Information technology provides a platform that increases possibilities for access and potentially the use and application of statistics and our agencies need to take full advantage of this, more so that it can be done at costs that are very low and rapidly declining. Do our agencies understand the special attribute of statistics of manifesting

⁵ Article appeared in The Star of 8th January 2008

⁶ Pali Lehohla, Statistician-General South Africa responded to The Star article and presented arguments to members of Parliament, staff of StatsSA and media

itself in a world of virtual networks. This gives statistics the attribute of versatility and portability.

Are our agencies, especially African ones ready and organised sufficiently to manage in an environment of press freedom?

13. Demand for statistics

The development and proliferation of ICT's Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are central to the creation of a global knowledge based economy and can play an important role in accelerating growth, promoting sustainable development and eradicating poverty in developing countries. This in turn facilitates effective integration into the global economy.

The Plan of Action adopted at the WSIS in December 2003 included a comprehensive list of activities and actions to be undertaken by Governments, the international community, the business sector and civil society. All aspects of the information society, ranging from economic, legal, health and education matters to media, culture and the environment were addressed in the Plan of Action.

The cadre of African ministers responsible for Finance, Planning and Economic Development have made demands on the African Statistics System and by the same token demand better and faster production of statistics on the performance of the economy, the living conditions of the population and increasingly on matters of climate change and bio-fuels and food prices. Days for supply driven statistics have disappeared on the continent and the demand is coming thick and fast, but the question is whether the statisticians are strategic about the opportunities that are coming to the fore. Do African heads and management of statistical agencies geared adequately to manage in this changing environment?

14. Leadership and management

A critical issue in Africa is providing leadership not only in statistics, but all round. In this regard the political leadership in Africa has set a clear agenda on which knowledge will be required. For instance the New partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) aims at promoting trade within Africa and building infrastructure to enable trans Africa movement of goods, services and people. For this to happen Africa requires data on purchasing power parities and comparisons. In this regard ICP-Africa, provides a step in the right direction. The second area of priority which also depends on ICP-Africa is the desire to create the Monetary Union for Africa and the establishment of a Free Trade area on the continent. The other important objective is the transition form African Union Commission to the united states of Africa. For this to happen, the statistics agencies on the continent will have to jerk up the quality of the information of their countries and understand the development agenda of the continent.

However, the leadership of NSOs on the continent is not able to sufficiently balance the ambiguities between politics and statistics. There is a growing notion that, to be effective, NSOs should be completely autonomous. While this may work, we should remind ourselves that autonomy best serves us when it is earned. Like greatness in Shakespeare, Malvolio says some are born great, some earn greatness whilst others have greatness thrust upon them. As statisticians and profering the scientific method we fall necessarily in the category where greatness is earned, so autonomy has to be earned. We have to be aware of dangers of “autonomy” which at times translate in government starving the autonomous body with financial resources. Under those circumstances the agency begins producing its products on a cost recovery basis. This is a real danger to what statistics offices provide as their priorities are largely going to be skewed by who pays. In most of our developing countries there is a growing risk of NSOs being taken over by the donor community, thereby failing to discharge a national duty. Are our offices adequately mature to balance demands with relevance of what is required, quality and above all, does our statistical leadership dispense the information without fear, favour or prejudice?

14.1 What does it take to lead?

In order to lead, some countries on the continent have to rise to the responsibility of collaborating and assisting peers to grow. According to the results of ICP-Africa, there are countries whose economies are sizeable. South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria have about forty percent of the GDP of the continent amongst the three of them. In this regard they have to be seen to play the role of significance in the statistical affairs of the continent. Besides, history of statistical development suggests to us that elsewhere, countries of a sizeable economic muscle and intellectual leadership played a significant role in the development of statistics in the region where they are located. In fact these countries have also extended support beyond their immediate geography. In this regard, the contribution by Sweden SIDA in statistical development is without doubt a very important example for extending assistance. They have done so to Eastern Europe and they have also covered the African continent extensively as well as Asia.

African countries that have regional presence should not shy away from these responsibilities. Countries that will emerge from war, already demonstrate great economic value, in fact where there is war on the continent, the matter of economic worth also seems to be present. These countries are likely to join the leadership ranks of Africa in the next few decades. The DRC, Sudan and Angola are amongst some of the sleeping economic giants. When they emerge out of war, it is not inappropriate to suggest what role they should play to themselves, but more importantly at a multilateral level, we need to deliberately define without any apologies, what could be expected of them in the new scenario of peace. Statistics and statistical development should preoccupy them.

14.2 What is the challenge for South Africa?

Addressing the South African Statistics Association in 2003, Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel posed the following challenges to the South African, African and global community of statistics:

“Returning to SASA I would suggest that of its 50 years existence, the past decade has been the most challenging and the most rewarding because it is the first period that SASA was freed from the strictures of apartheid. For the first time therefore, SASA could draw on the skills of much wider cross-section of South Africans. This fact is borne out by the representation here.

Let me share with you some of my observations about challenges that confront SASA. I speak as a non-statistician, but as one depends on timely and accurate statistics for evidence-based decision-making. I speak as the Minister responsible for statistics, but who is prohibited by statute from being directly involved in the work of STATS SA. I have a filter in the form of the Statistics Council Chaired by Dr Hillary Southall to intercede between STATS SA and I on the outputs of STATS SA.

The first challenge I would like to share with you is embedded in South Africa’s past. Apartheid was a lie. It was a lie, which masqueraded as truth, because it was apparently supported by numbers. Blacks were not counted, they were not even regarded as South Africans. Notwithstanding, there were so-called statistical outputs derived by warped fertility and morbidity models, with the occasional aerial photographs to support the thesis. Today, there exists amongst ordinary people an unhealthy disregard for official statistics. Perhaps people remain of the view that the numbers will be made up anyway. The first challenge, which confronts SASA, is the restoration of trust in official statistics. Without the vital element of trust, no official statistics will be reliable.

The second challenge is that there are too few South Africans who love statistics or have a passion for it. As with the first challenge, this too is embedded in South Africa’s apartheid history. On 17 September 1953, the Minister of Native Affairs, H F Verwoerd, addressed Parliament and said, “What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice.” Thus Bantu Education was introduced in 1954, consciously de-emphasising the teaching of Mathematics and Science.

A generation of maths students was destroyed and thereafter, successive generations of maths teachers. To this day, the teaching of maths and science, where it occurs in the majority of schools is too frequently mediocre. Ten years into democracy, this residue of apartheid decision lives on. It must be reversed - not merely at universities or in the work place, but at primary and pre-schools. SASA has a role to play. We have a model teaching approach in International Conference for the Teaching of Statistics (ICOTS) which must be built out as a conscious effort to interrupt the cycle of the poverty of numeracy.

The third challenge is the absence of sufficient discourse on methodology and outcomes. At a distance I observe how easily positions are polarised and entrenched. I have seen this with data sets like causes of death, road accidents, crime and HIV and AIDS. Statisticians become the analysts. Results trump method. The value of statistics is lost. I truly hope that SASA, and this conference, in particular, will deal with this illusion of certainty which parades as professional confidence.

*The fourth challenge is to try and pace ourselves relative to our capacity. I have, at close quarters, observed the struggles of my counterparts on the Africa continent as they prepare poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP's). The PRSP's must be consulted upon and have a strong statistical foundation. In the absence of the latter, these countries cannot easily access facilities such as the debt relief for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). South Africa, or parts of it, are highly sophisticated. We aren't deemed either highly indebted or poor. **We are thus required to play in a different league.** We have to comply with the Special Data Dissemination Standards (SDDS). The requirements are onerous.*

Yet, we must recognise that the South Africa of the majority is indeed deeply poor. Similarly, we lack a sufficient skills endowment to meet all of the requirements. SASA must rise to the challenge of deepening the skills base whilst engaging in a process to determine how much we can undertake reasonably.”⁷

14.3 How has the Statistics Community in South Africa addressed the challenge?

South Africa has had **to play in a different league** by virtue of what it committed to both domestically and internationally. In this regard, I will demonstrate how over a short space of time operating within a multilateral environment made a modest but useful contribution to the development of statistics on the continent. What was important in South Africa is that the political leadership, like in Mozambique explicitly provided the space and latitude for the office to do what it does best. The President of South Africa, President Thabo Mbeki, in 1998 as Deputy President, said that he would expect to use statistics and those statistics will be from Statistics South Africa. In that way he gave an unambiguous message about the role of the institution. Further, he has not however, stopped being a critique of the statistics, thus allowing and providing space for scientific discourse in the arena of official statistics.

In assuming its challenging role amongst nations, South Africa hosted two international conferences on censuses. This was in 2001 and 2003 respectively. In 2005 South Africa hosted the Commonwealth Conference of Official Statistics. From 1997, under the auspices of SADC Millennium Census Project, South Africa was a focal point for the project, and under its supervision, it shared the training programmes with African countries outside SADC. Nigeria was regular at our training workshops for the 2000 Round of censuses. Currently South Africa is running a Survey Methodology programme with Westat, and all SADC member states each send two of their staff members with a 100% financial contribution from South Africa. With the encouragement of African states and the states called the Friends of the ECA, South Africa led the African Symposia for Statistical Development and contributed in the resuscitation of the statistics function at UNECA. South Africa will soon be opening its Statistics Institute, and this will have a stature of an international institution where African statisticians will come and train in both official statistics, geographic information

⁷ Trevor Manuel is the South African Minister of Finance and Statistics South Africa reports to him

systems as they apply to statistical offices and leadership. South Africa will be hosting the 57th Session of the ISI, and in preparation for this session has sponsored a number of Africans to both ISI sessions as well as in-country preparatory conferences on a competitive basis. One of this pre-ISI conference is the June 2008 Young Statistician Conference which South Africa will host in preparation for young Africans statisticians who will participate in the 57th Session of the ISI in Durban next year. This is just a list of examples of what can be done.

In the area of content development South Africa, has invested in retired international experts to contribute in the major changes that the work programme of Statistics South Africa is undertaking. These experts are paid by Statistics South Africa and my belief as the head of the organisation is that if it is important, then my office and South Africans should be the first to pay for it and not the donors. The results from these are becoming obvious as the office gains confidence and respect in the country and elsewhere.

It is therefore important that countries that have economic muscle should be sufficiently modest and motivated to flex this muscle to the statistical benefit of the regions in which they operate and to the continent. Africa can and should be self-sufficient and exchange and engage on a toe-to-toe basis in matters statistics.

14.4 Contributions from the continent

There are other examples of collaboration where offices of countries such as Uganda have extended assistance of an intellectual nature to neighbouring countries. Kenya office actually came to the rescue of the South African office during the processing of census data in 2002. The contribution from Kenya was invaluable and we are currently toying with an assistance package plan for the Sudan along similar models as provided by Kenya to South Africa. Our own professional statisticians like Ajayi and Kiregyera have contributed immensely in shaping the African statistical renaissance. In this regard statistics associations and councils have a definitive role to play in statistical development, in fact in renewal and maintenance initiatives of official statistics.

These collaborative efforts are part of the leadership programme of making Africa a better place through its statistical development programmes.

15. Conclusion and how has Africa positioned itself

For statistical development on the continent, Africa positioned itself on four pillars in the post-colonial era. The first was to create a statistical office, the second was to create regional training institutions, the third was to establish a work programme and the fourth was to have a regional agency responsible for development and statistics. We have observed how these institutions decayed over time, primarily due to lack and absence of leadership and the concomitant political instability that characterised Africa during the period of colonial domination and in the post colonisation period. By the nineties, Africa's statistical development was in a sorry state both at country level and at the ECA in Addis Ababa. The training institutions were a shadow of what they used to be and the

work programme was responding to those who paid the piper, particularly the donors. African statistics offices were now beholden and mortgaged. However by the end of the nineties, we have also observed a very strong sub stream driven by democratisation of Africa and the demand for statistics. Secondly new desires for a better world order and better engagement with the United Nations Statistics Division and the United Nations Statistics Commission arose. These pleaded the case for Africa, through a multiplicity of programmes that are organised and sanctioned by the Commission, such as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, Development Account, SDDS, GDDS, ICP, PARIS21 and the implementation of the recommendations regarding measurement of Millennium Development Goals. As directed from Commission resolutions, these initiatives provided further impetus for statistical development. Whilst these initiatives at first glance did not hold immediate hope for statistical development generally, over time they have proved to become strong support structures for renewal and support for especially ailing systems of official statistics in Africa. An analysis across the last eight years does demonstrate that collectively these initiatives have placed Africa on a different and high trajectory in the development of statistics. Africa has shown enthusiasm and appetite for measurement and this is a promising sign as it democratises. Its users have demanded better and relevant statistics. However, there are leadership lapses in these organisations and these can be ill-afforded and have to be watched carefully and remedied before damage is done. There have been encouraging south-south collaboration practices, especially under the auspices of the UNSD.

Africa however, still requires to do first things first. This, in the main means that Africa should focus on the content and by this I mean technical and professional content of official statistics rather than matters of form. Under the guidance of the UNSC, there is sufficient promise that Africa is going to turn the corner and have its systems of statistics play a critical contribution in the global system of statistics, especially when Africa is assisted in continuous attendance of the Commission. This is especially so because of the unique political, economic and social circumstances under which Africa finds its statistical expression as we alluded to the decolonisation environment in Africa. Africa was not wrong in focusing on the four pillars. These should remain the area of focus and in addition Africa should promote statistical leadership and culture in order to ensure that Africa creates sustainable systems of statistics on the continent. This will also require at the international level that Millennium Goal 8, of building partnerships, is pursued rigorously by all, including adhering to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The initiatives of PARIS21 have demonstrated that renewal is possible and it is good for statistics and it has been good, especially for developing countries as they worked on the agenda of reviving and servicing the fragile democracies that emerged and statistics have begun to make their mark. The aim should be to entrench statistical culture and evidence based policy making. When we succeed in that regard, then we will know that statistical practice in Africa has been consolidated and can exist as a useful contributor in perpetuity.