UNITED NATIONS ⊕ NATIONS UNIES

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON BIG DATA
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Opening Remarks
Stefan Schweinfest
Director, United Nations Statistics Division
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Dear Deputy-Commissioner Xian,

Dear Vice-Governor Zhu,

Dear Colleagues,

It is my sincere pleasure to virtually be with you at this International Seminar on Big Data, which marks the beginning of the activities of the Regional Hub for Big Data in Hangzhou. After the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding yesterday evening in this same hall, the actual work starts today.

I would like to thank Commissioner Ning for his leadership to embrace the use of Big Data for official statistics and to position the National Bureau of Statistics at the forefront of modernization. The Regional Hub in Hangzhou will give the statisticians in the Asia-Pacific region the opportunity to learn hands-on about data science and the use of Big Data.

In my remarks today, I would like to give you some more information about the task teams of the Global Working Group on Big Data for official statistics and about the UN Global Platform and its relation to the Regional Hub in China.

The global working group delivers most of its work through task teams, which develop methods, prepare handbooks, conduct capacity building activities and collaborate actively on the UN Global Platform. The task teams work on various Big Data sources, such as satellite data, mobile phone data, scanner data, and vessel tracking data, on privacy preserving techniques and on training.

For example, the task team on satellite data researches methods to minimize the use of agricultural survey data and maximize the use of satellite data for the production of crop statistics, which should maintain the overall quality of the results while reducing the cost.

Another example is the task team on training, which wants to ensure that statistical institutes around the world are increasingly equipped to work effectively with non-traditional data to produce high-quality statistics. This team is also building a Learning Management System on the UN Global Platform, which will make it possible for the statistical community, including the Regional Hubs, to run on-line training courses.

Dear colleagues,

I mentioned the UN Global Platform a few times. What is this exactly and what can it be used for?

The Global Platform is a Cloud-based infrastructure which hosts a few global data sets together with services, tools and applications, which make it possible for statisticians and data scientists from around the world to collaborate on Big Data projects. The platform is supported and maintained by the statistical community. It really is our own platform, which means that it can also be used by all of you.

Several projects are currently running on the platform. For example, FAO and UNSD together with Senegal are jointly testing the so-called Sen2Agri application. In this project, Sentinel-2 satellite imagery for every part of Senegal is ingested into the application on the UN global platform, and then processed to produce the mapping of crops for the whole country. This is done month by month to get an accurate picture of the development of crops over time. The project also includes training for the staff of the Senegalese office executed directly on the UN Global Platform.

Similar projects are starting up for the measurement of eco-systems and for the measurement of access to all-season roads in rural areas.

The Global Platform hosts AIS vessel tracking data, which is a real-time data feed which monitors the position and movement of about every ship in the world. These data are actively used on the platform to measure movement of ships into and out of ports and to estimate CO_2 emission of maritime transport by geographical location.

I encourage the Regional Hub in China to be an active user of the platform for project and training activities. This will also help statisticians from developing countries in Asia and the Pacific, who will come to Hangzhou to learn in a very practical way how to use Big Data for official statistics.

Let me finish by saying that I see great potential for the Regional Hub here in Hangzhou.

The Regional Hub will train the next generation of data scientists, who will be working in statistical offices. It will be a laboratory to test new data sources, new methods and new technologies and it will help the statistical offices in Asia and the Pacific to make the next step in their modernization to produce timelier, more frequent and more granular data than they have done so far.

I wish you all very enjoyable and fruitful discussions in this International Seminar on Big Data.

Thank you.