



**AFRICA REGION COMMENTS ON
THE GUIDELINES ON DATA FLOWS AND
GLOBAL DATA REPORTING FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**



Purpose

- The purpose of this presentation is to present African Countries' views, informed by realities and challenges of the National Statistical Systems in the region, on the guidelines on data flows and global data reporting for Sustainable Development Goals.
- It is based on a case study of best practices on data flows conducted in Tanzania and experiences from Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia and Ghana.



Regional context

- ▶ The Africa Agenda 2063 presents a socioeconomic transformation agenda for the continent for the period of 50 years starting from 2013, and has the commitment of all African countries.
- ▶ With its 7 aspirations, 20 goals and 174 targets, the Agenda 2063 has considerable overlaps with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- ▶ Two major subsidiary and complementary regional fora are in place to address statistical system and data development challenges in the region:
- ▶ The **Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa)**, under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development which meets every two years; and
- ▶ The **Committee of Directors-General of National Statistical Offices (CoDG)**, under the aegis of the African Union (AU) Conference of African Ministers of Economy and Finance (CAMEF), meets on annual basis.



Regional context

- ▶ The Africa Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD), a forum of statistical community in Africa, is a country-led initiative and represents a unique platform to tackle strategic challenges facing the African Statistical System. The ASSD meets once every year.
- ▶ In addition to the fora, two main frameworks (the **Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA)** and the **African Charter on Statistics**) guide statistical activities in the Region:
- ▶ The **Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA)** is built around the importance of having harmonized and standardized definitions and concepts, adapting international statistical norms to African realities and specificities; and using common methodologies for the production, management and dissemination of statistics by all African countries.



Regional context

- ▶ The **African Charter on Statistics** aims at serving as a policy framework for statistics development in Africa, especially the production, management and dissemination of statistical data and information at national, regional and continental levels.
- ▶ The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Development Bank resolved in 2007, among others, to set up a joint data collection mechanism for socioeconomic data from African countries; the development of a common harmonized database; and the production of a joint African Statistical Yearbook (ASYB).



Coordination

- One of the key challenges in the current statistical arena in many countries is weak coordination of statistical activities and in effect dissemination, sharing, and flow of statistical information.
- African countries are committed to implement the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data which calls for coordination and strategic leadership on data for sustainable development.
- A number of African countries have conducted needs and capacity assessment of their national statistical systems in order to improve their ability to produce and share their statistics.
- Most countries have also developed and are implementing National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) where coordination has been highlighted as a nucleus.
- Existing coordination mechanisms within the NSS should therefore be strengthened with the NSOs as the centers of statistical coordination including at sub national level.
- The statistical system Stakeholders in Africa need to explore new technologies and approaches for setting effective, vertical and horizontal coordination structures and improving data quality.



Data reporting

- The main challenges facing NSS include among others, weak communication and collaboration between line ministries, Departments and Executive Agencies (MDAs) and NSOs, between NSOs and Non-State Actors in the NSS, and between the NSSs and Custodian Agencies (CAs).
- Responsibilities of production and dissemination of data in the NSS creates another level of complication, especially where there are no clear policy frameworks to guide dissemination and sharing of such data.
- Depending on country contexts and on the legal mandates of the National Statistical Offices (NSOs), the NSOs play a crucial role in coordination of the NSS by setting and safeguarding standards, concepts and definitions in line with the international norms including to support production of high quality statistics by other national entities.
- Effectiveness of NSSs in playing this role will need to be further strengthened.



Custodian Agencies (CAs) Role

- Experiences from selected countries in Africa suggest that some practices and existing relationships and links between CAs and national reporting agencies would need to be improved.
- The following areas require interventions to improve SDGs data flow from National to Regional and to global databases:
 - **Communication between Stakeholders**
 - The findings from the case study on Tanzania and experiences from the selected countries shows that there is, at times, communication break down between CAs and national reporting agencies.
 - The situation was similar with regard to request from CAs to national agencies.
 - Hence, there is strong need for improvement of communications on SDG indicators between CAs and national reporting agencies.



Custodian Agencies (CAs) Role

- **Limited cooperation between CAs and National Reporting Agencies validating modelled or adjusted statistics for global comparison**
- There is limited cooperation between CAs and National Reporting Agencies in African countries in validating modelled or adjusted statistics for global comparison.
- This undermines acceptability of the indicators computed by CAs for use at the national level – often it means that national agencies would not use them for reporting/tracking progress and for decision-making.
- Improving collaboration and assisting national government agencies to build the necessary capacity to be able either to compute the indicators on their own or validate them will be crucial in enhancing credibility of the CAs modelled indicators for national use.



Custodian Agencies (CAs) Role

- ▶ **Discrepancies between the National and Global reported SDGs indicators**
- ▶ The findings from the case study and the experiences from selected countries indicate that there are cases where national indicators exist but differ significantly from globally reported indicators.
- ▶ Often, in such situations there is limited proof of CAs having made effort to validate the indicators with national agencies even though national agencies are already collecting data and computing statistics for the indicators (e.g. 3.6.1 Death rate due to road traffic accidents, and 9.1.2 Passenger and freight volumes, by mode of transport in Tanzania).
- ▶ Moreover, there are cases where a modelled indicator exists but has not been validated by national agencies and therefore not used at national level for decision-making.
- ▶ The current data flow process in Africa has, therefore, to be improved, including through establishment of clear arrangement and calendar for validation by national reporting agencies in collaboration with the CAs.



Custodian Agencies (CAs) Role

- **Use of CAs modelled and harmonized indicators which are not produced by countries in their National Reporting Platforms (NRP)**
- Most of African countries would be willing to use the modelled and harmonized indicators in their NRP only if the national reporting agencies participated in the validation process and endorsed the indicators.
- However, if an indicator is produced at the country by national reporting agencies and it differs from the globally modelled indicator, African countries are of the view that the national indicator should continue to be used until a consensus is established and methodologies are harmonized or validated between the national agencies and the CAs.
- This is important to avoid sending out multiple or contradictory values for the same indicator.
- Custodian agencies need to give enough time for countries (at least one month as proposed in the guideline) for the validation process in order to provide better quality data, while also being conscious of and taking steps to address potential capacity gaps that may exist in countries to limit effectiveness of the validation processes.
- The reporting burden on countries should also be minimized by effective coordination among all partners in the NSSs.
- The validation process by custodian agencies should be transparent to avoid data discrepancies.
- Countries should be fully involved in the process of imputations and adjustments before dissemination of the results.



Guidelines on Big Data

- Big data, which arises from interactions with various technological environments such as telecommunications, the Internet and use of cloud computing services, should be seriously exploited by African NSSs to increase, in the near future, their performance and use to complement data from other sources such as government administrative data, surveys and censuses.
- One of the issues limiting utilization of big data relates to concerns about the extent of adherence to fundamental principles of official statistics.
- The most important risk is with respect to the requirements of privacy and confidentiality, and restrictions posed by statistical and other national laws.
- At the same time, there are also concerns about the quality of the information collected, and limitations in capacities as well as utilization of technological tools for their analysis in National Statistical Offices.
- Generally, access to big data databases seem to be very difficult, and may need special arrangements that stakeholders of the NSSs may not be sufficiently prepared to set up.



Data quality

- ▶ With the view of enhancing quality of statistics produced in the continent, African countries have adopted the African charter on statistics and some of them have developed data quality assurance frameworks.
- ▶ Implementation of the framework continues to be challenging for many countries, and extensive data quality checks are needed still, especially but not only for administrative data sources.



Guidelines on the production of international data series for SDG indicators

■ Data Sharing and Partnership

- Given the large number of goals, targets and indicators of the SDGs, reporting of SDGs requires an enormous amount of data from different sources.
- For example, data gap assessment that was done in Tanzania shows that only 39 percent of data required for SDGs reporting come from surveys and censuses and the rest (61 percent) is expected from administrative records and other non-traditional data sources.
- The same assessment in Ethiopia shows that, 36 percent is from survey and censuses and the rest from administrative and other sources. However, data sharing and partnership on statistics production is relatively weak in many African countries.
- In order to strengthen data sharing and partnership of different data producers in the country, the following are recommended:
 - All major data producers in the country should have systems that will allow exchange of data, metadata etc. in the most efficient way (interoperability).
 - The data and metadata structures to facilitate interoperability do not exist in many African countries or where it exists it is not fully operational.
 - As far as possible, African countries should develop data and metadata structures to facilitate easier exchange so as to allow reporting and dissemination at the national, continental and global levels.



Guidelines on the production of international data series for SDG indicators

- The use of appropriate data transmission standards and tools that enable the automation of data exchanges such as through Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) in open data format should be promoted.
- Although many National Statistical Offices in Africa are mandated by law to coordinate National Statistical Systems in their respective countries, introduction and use of Memorandum of Understandings (MoU) between the NSOs and other producers may be helpful to improve the partnership aspect within the NSSs.
- It has been tested and used in Botswana and Cameroon and proved helpful in increasing data production and accessibility for evidence-based decisions.
- Signing of the MoUs will “bind” the signing parties to compile and share data on time and hence do away with challenges of delay and discrepancies; and,
- Since the National Statistical Offices are the official coordinators of NSSs in countries, then NSOs should always be involved in ongoing activities between custodian agencies and other data producers in the country.



Coordination with Regional Initiatives for Data Dissemination

- In addition to direct work with countries' NSOs and other National Reporting Agencies, Custodian Agencies and the UNSD are encouraged to coordinate their interventions for data flows to global level with Africa Regional entities initiatives, specifically the StatCom – Africa, the Africa Union Commission and the African Development Bank, as well as with Regional Economic Cooperation Offices.
- This is important to reduce reporting burden to countries, and to facilitate coordinated investments in statistics capacity development.
- On the data dissemination front, one option is to explore, for example, how the UNSD National Reporting Platform Initiatives could link with the African Development Bank – African Information Highway (AIH) Data Portals initiative, and the Africa Statistics Year Book.
- It may be useful that needs assessment is done as some adjustments and improvements may be required to accommodate response to the various data demands on National Reporting Agencies.



Capacity Building

- The challenge for Africa is how to build statistical systems that are flexible and responsive to the enormous task of the SDG indicator and monitoring framework.
- Africa needs long-lasting investment and technical support from partners in order to build strong and appropriate Statistical Systems that can meet the existing and future demands.
- Comprehensive and updated capacity building action plan based on the carefully identified needs of country NSSs and in compliance with SHaSA and the African Charter on Statistics has to be elaborated to improve capacity of the region to meets requirements of SDG monitoring.

Recommendations

■ On capacity development in Africa

- In line with commitments towards implementation of the SHaSA and as per the AU Union Member States Ministerial decision to allocate a minimum of 0.15% of the national budget to statistics, African countries are encouraged to set aside sufficient resources from internal sources for statistical capacity development.
- This is crucial to demonstrate political will in promoting evidence-based decision making.
- Partners and international organizations are urged to support African countries in their efforts to develop NSDS actions aimed at the acquisition of knowledge, know-how and skills, staff qualifications and equipment strengthening as well as for improvement of statistical infrastructure and technology resources.

■ On Data gap assessment

- UNSD and other partners are encouraged to work with African countries to support assessments of the statistics capacities of the NSSs to compile the global SDGs indicators and to provide technical and financial assistance in the preparation of the National Strategic Implementation Plans to measure the progress towards SDGs in the countries.

■ On custodian agencies interventions

- In order to improve communication between CAs and national institutions it is recommended that, all requests to NSS should go through NSOs, and in particular through the SDG Coordinators in the NSOs.
- Partners are invited to collaborate with the national agencies to build necessary capacity for the computation and validation of global indicators to avoid reporting multiple values for the same indicator from the same country.



Thank you