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Items for discussion and decision: regional statistical development in Africa

Report of the Economic Commission for Africa

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its forty-third session (see E/2012/24, chap. I.A), the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Economic Commission for Africa on regional statistical development in Africa. The report highlights issues and challenges facing African countries in enhancing their statistical capacity. It gives an overview of areas of primary focus for statistical development in Africa and the ongoing initiatives by African stakeholders aimed at overcoming those challenges. The Commission may wish to comment on ongoing efforts aimed at boosting the statistical development of African countries and organizations in support of countries' development efforts in the region. It might also wish to consider calling upon all stakeholders, including development partners, to scale up their support for statistical development initiatives on the continent. Actions to be taken by the Commission are contained in paragraph 94 of the report.

* E/CN.3/2013/1.



Report of the Economic Commission for Africa on regional statistical development in Africa

I. Introduction

1. Development strategies and frameworks in Africa dictate the need for indicators to measure inputs, outputs, impacts and outcomes. These strategies and frameworks include sectoral policies and programmes (in governance, peace and security, agriculture, education, health, labour, employment and informal economy, investment, private sector, human development (gender, social protection, equity, human rights), trade and industry, environment and infrastructure development); national development plans (usually poverty reduction strategy papers and other five-year plans); long-term national development plans (national visions); regional development frameworks (for example, the New Partnership for Africa's Development); international initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals; and policy research.

2. Statistics in Africa are required to inform cross-cutting issues, including democracy and good governance, gender, HIV/AIDS surveillance and monitoring, energy, climate change and environment and human rights.

3. Because most national statistical systems in Africa are, among other things, under-resourced, most data needs cannot be met. Priority should be given to meeting national demand for statistics, including data required for managing the economy and stimulating social development, such as data on gross domestic product (GDP), prices, foreign trade, employment and unemployment, wages, health, education, environment and other sectoral statistics. These needs are usually identified in periodic governmental statements on policy and in budget proposals.

4. The present report covers progress in areas of primary focus for statistical development in Africa, while indicating the related challenges faced by the African statistical system as well as some of the recent initiatives taken within the framework of statistical development in Africa. The report is a follow-up to the previous report to the Commission (E/CN.3/2008/14) and provides an update on important developments in the past five years.

5. The report finally proposes key potential actions to be taken by the Commission in order to propel the statistical development of the African continent to new heights.

II. Areas of primary focus for statistical development in Africa

A. Governance, peace and security

6. Reliable and harmonized statistics on governance, peace and security are crucial for the development and stability of African countries. The African Union Commission, in collaboration with the African Governance Institute, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Afrobarometer and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), is developing an action plan, a minimal list of indicators and a harmonized questionnaire to improve the production of governance, peace and

security statistics in Africa. This plan is expected to inform the African Peer Review Mechanism process, support monitoring and help in resolving conflicts for the well-being of African society and the stability of the whole continent.

B. National accounts

7. There are many challenges confronting the compilation of national accounts statistics in Africa. In general, the development of viable harmonious national accounts systems across the continent is still at an early stage. National accounts statistics are inadequate and not fully comparable across countries. There are limited human, financial and technical resources as well as weak capacity within the statistical systems, coupled with inadequate infrastructure to support statistical operations. Owing to the poor state of technology, the industry and product nomenclatures are too aggregated. With weak national statistical systems, timely data are not readily available and disseminated in the various areas of statistics.

8. According to the project document for the implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts in Africa from 2102 to 2107, in the vast majority of cases national accounts in Africa are compiled by national statistical offices. The number of professional staff working in the national accounts departments of those offices is relatively small. The average number of national accountants per country is eight and more than half of African countries have fewer than six professional staff working in the national accounts departments of their national statistical offices. Staff turnover is relatively high: on average, four national accounts professionals have left national accounts departments in the last five years. The lack of resources and weak capacity to carry out household and business surveys and censuses for data collection to meet the minimum dataset requirement for national accounts is reflected in the fact that most of the data sources (60 to 70 per cent) used for compiling national accounts rely on administrative records from industries ranging from agriculture and manufacturing to services.

9. The overall statistical infrastructure in terms of data dissemination, networks with users and respondents and analytical capacity is also relatively weak in the whole continent. For example, the average number of months it takes to release the first estimate of a survey is five months, while the final estimate takes around 17 months. An advance release calendar exists only in about half of countries.

10. Different versions of the System of National Accounts are used in different countries. While most countries (88 per cent) are using the 1993 system, some (12 per cent) are still using the 1968 system. The use of the older system is not concentrated in any subregion but spread among them.

11. One of the issues that emerged from the 2005 round of the International Comparison Programme for Africa was the lack of consistency in national accounts between some countries. Despite the fact that countries were compiling their national accounts in accordance with either the 1968 or 1993 System of National Accounts, there were significant discrepancies between some countries' accounts because their estimates did not fully cover everything in some important basic headings. In Africa, the basic heading for imputed rents of owner-occupied dwellings stood out as being a major source of inconsistencies between countries, with estimates ranging from zero to more than 10 per cent of GDP. Other important components were also affected by having less than the full coverage recommended

in the System of National Accounts. For example, large variations between countries at similar stages of economic development in the levels of own-account production and consumption indicated that some countries' estimates were not completely in accordance with the scope defined in the System of National Accounts.

12. There is a challenge concerning the inclusion of the informal sector in the national accounts on a regular basis. In many cases, only formal activities are partially covered while informal activities are largely not reflected. Among the institutional sectors, non-profit institutions and civil societies are generally covered but state and local government and aid agencies are not. Consequently, the true size of the economy is not fully captured by the national accounts.

13. Of the six phases identified by the Statistical Commission for the full implementation of the System of National Accounts, one fifth of African countries have reached only phase 1 (capacity to produce statistical aggregates of basic indicators of GDP at current and constant prices).

14. Most African countries (65 per cent) have so far reached phase 2 (additional economic aggregates of gross national income and other primary indicators). This group includes 27 countries compiling supply and use tables.

15. Fewer than eight countries (i.e. 15 per cent) have reached phase 3 (capability to produce the first step of institutional sector accounts).

16. In order to accelerate the implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts, the African Group on National Accounts has designed a strategy to establish national accounts tools for the African region in line with international standards and practices. The strategy aims to equip the continent with the capacity to develop national accounts in accordance with international standards, taking specific realities into consideration, as development levels across countries vary. At the operational level, a five-year (2010-2014) regional programme for the implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts has been developed to implement the strategy. The programme is being executed through an advocacy campaign that started with the 2011 African Statistics Day, whose theme was "Keeping accounts to improve Africa's present for a brighter future"; methodological developments followed by capacity-building (training and technical assistance); and strengthening of the institutional setting.

17. It is therefore necessary to continue the efforts for resource mobilization at all levels in order to strengthen institutional and human resource capacities in African countries for an effective implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts.

18. To monitor economic policies in Africa, the African Union Commission started to collect supply and use tables and integrated economic accounts tables for African countries. The main objective is to develop social account matrices and computable general equilibrium models in African countries. The African Union Commission plans to support development of supply and use tables, integrated economic accounts tables and computable general equilibrium models at country level.

C. Employment and informal sector and labour market information

19. The 2004 Ouagadougou Declaration on Employment and Poverty Alleviation and the related plan of action adopted by the ECA Conference of African Ministers

of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the 2010 Malabo Declaration place special emphasis on labour market information systems and include job creation and poverty alleviation initiatives as indicators in the African Peer Review Mechanism process.

20. The regional integrated employment policy framework recognizes the shortcomings of the labour market information systems in African countries and the resulting problems of planning, monitoring and evaluating employment policies for all labour-market stakeholders.

21. This framework aims to develop the labour market information systems at national level as the first step in the harmonization process. It also aims to encourage regional initiatives and spells out the role of pan-African organizations and development partners in this regard.

22. Capacity-building activities undertaken at the continental level under the leadership of the African Union resulted in the “Labour market harmonization and coordination framework project”. The action plan of the project and the minimum list of indicators were presented to the meeting of the Statistical Commission for Africa in January 2012 and to the African Union Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance in March 2012 and the Assembly of Heads of States and Government of the African Union in July 2012.

23. AfDB, under the statistical capacity-building programme, has been assisting countries to improve their labour statistics to cover the following areas: technical and operational support for conducting labour force surveys and household expenditure surveys; labour statistics classifications (product, economic activity and occupation classifications); and development of business registers. In addition, it has produced operational and methodological guide books for conducting labour force surveys and household expenditure surveys. The guide books were published in 2012.

24. In the framework of the Statistical Commission for Africa, the continent has established a technical working group on employment and the informal sector, with a focus on the integration of the informal sector in national accounts, innovations in measuring the informal sector, a methodological framework for the comparability of statistics on employment and the informal sector and the development of a common minimum module for data collection.

25. However, several problems have impeded the activities of this group, including the lack of financial resources, low participation in its meetings by countries and insufficient coordination between the activities of the group and other groups.

26. The scheduled work includes the finalization of a handbook by the end of 2012.

D. Statistics on external trade and balance of payments

27. Harmonized statistics on external trade and balance of payments are among the key data for monitoring the integration agenda in Africa. Countries are encouraged to use international merchandise trade statistics as a single methodology for the elaboration of trade statistics in Africa, Eurotrace for the treatment of foreign trade

data and the Automated System for Customs Data for recording customs declarations. For balance of payments, countries will be encouraged to implement the International Monetary Fund manual.

28. Efforts undertaken have resulted in the publication of the *Compendium of Intra-African and Related Foreign Trade Statistics*. The Compendium was first published by the Statistics Division of ECA in 1997. It was a recurrent publication produced on a biennial basis until 2005, when it was discontinued. The publication only resumed when the African Centre for Statistics at ECA started producing it from 2011. The first edition of “The status of intra-African trade”, which informed the July 2012 African Union summit on the theme of boosting intra-African trade, was published by the African Union Commission in July 2012.

E. Harmonized consumer price indices

29. The monitoring of monetary policies in Africa requires consumer price indices comparable across countries. Under the leadership of AfDB, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and various statistics secretariats have since 2010 embarked on a programme to assist these two regional economic communities¹ in compiling harmonized consumer price indices in line with the subregional efforts to meet macroeconomic convergence criteria. Member countries of the two regional economic communities have been compiling their respective harmonized consumer price indices and posting them on COMESA, SADC and AfDB websites. AfDB, under phase III of its Statistical Capacity-building Programme, will provide similar support to the remaining subregional organizations, namely, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States and the Arab Maghreb Union.

F. Environment and related statistics

30. The continent is promoting the use of international standards on environment and related statistics. This has been done by setting up the African Group on Environment and Related Statistics during the third session of the Statistical Commission for Africa in 2012. The aim of the Group is to provide an efficient coordination mechanism for the existing activities in Africa as well as assistance and guidance to countries in the area of environment statistics. The Group will also be a vehicle for collating the views of African countries to be collectively tabled at international level.

¹ The regional economic communities in Africa group together individual countries in subregions for the purposes of achieving greater economic integration and development. They are described as the building blocks of the African Union. Currently, there are eight regional economic communities recognized by the African Union, each established under a separate regional treaty: the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

G. Population and housing censuses

31. One of the six action points recommended by the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics adopted by the Second International Roundtable on Managing for Development Results was to prepare for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses as the main source of data for socio-economic planning and development. The pan-African organizations along with the United Nations agencies and other international partners came together to promote and support implementation of the 2010 round in African countries. ECA, in partnership with other pan-African organizations and some leading countries such as South Africa, vigorously advocated for an enhanced participation of African countries during the round, particularly through the Africa Symposiums on Statistical Development, the last of which was held in Cairo in 2010. As a result of this effort, so far, 33 countries have already undertaken their censuses and all others are planning to conduct one by 2014, with the exception of Somalia.

32. ECA, in collaboration with AfDB, the African Union Commission, United Nations agencies and other international agencies and with strong support from Statistics South Africa, has assisted countries in building capacities in various areas of census through workshops and expert groups meetings. These areas include census planning and enumeration; census evaluation and post-enumeration surveys; census data processing, analysis and dissemination; and census data archiving. Training and technical assistance were also provided to a number of countries on the use of digital techniques for census cartography and data processing; census cartography and data processing; dissemination through the development of an interactive digital atlas; and geospatial revision and updating of cartographic products.

33. ECA developed a series of manuals and handbooks for guiding and supporting countries in their endeavour to improve census data quality. These included (a) an African addendum to the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*; (b) a handbook on data capture (to be finalized); (c) a handbook on data editing; and (d) a handbook on data tabulation.

34. While the challenge of conducting censuses in Africa is being resolved, the use of census data remains at an unacceptably low level. This happens for a variety of reasons, including census data availability and accessibility. The African Census Analysis Project was launched in Pretoria in 1997. The project has successfully retrieved and archived data from several past African censuses and these census data are now available for research. Building on this initiative, the *Africa Demography* series has been initiated with contributions from African scholars and practitioners.

35. It is worth noting that the African Integrated Census Microdata website has been launched at the African Centre for Statistics, through which 51,524,324 records are freely available to researchers and policymakers. By simply registering and agreeing to the conditions of user license such as protection of statistical confidentiality, and sharing research results, visitors can download and use the desired datasets.

36. The continent is planning an assessment of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses in 2013 covering various aspects such as the questions asked, the outputs generated and the processes followed in collection, processing and dissemination of data. It is also proposed to disseminate manuals and handbooks on

population and housing censuses already developed by ECA and integrate them in the curriculums of the statistical training centres for greater outreach.

H. Civil registration and vital statistics

37. The continent has recognized the continuing importance of civil registration and vital statistics in advancing Africa's development agenda, including accelerating regional integration, attaining the priorities of NEPAD and meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

38. ECA, the African Union and AfDB, in partnership with other regional institutions and United Nations agencies, have embarked on a major initiative for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems on the continent. The effort has now been conceptualized as a continent-wide programme known as the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS), which aims at adopting a holistic approach to address systemic issues related to legal, policy, management and operational aspects of civil registration and vital statistics. The Africa Symposium on Statistical Development, having achieved its previous objectives of getting African States to embark on the 2010 round of population and housing censuses, has decided to now focus on the development of civil registration and vital statistics in all countries across the continent.

39. One of the major achievements has been the commitment made by ministers responsible for civil registration at their first conference, held in August 2010 in Addis Ababa, to support a time-bound implementation plan for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in their respective countries. The declaration made by the ministers during the meeting, and the medium-term action plan developed by the expert group meeting earlier and endorsed by the ministers, now form the basis of future action for accelerating improvement of the civil registration and vital statistics systems in the region.

40. During the conference, the ministers recommended the institutionalization of their conference as a standing platform to meet every two years, keep track of progress in the implementation of the programme and provide continued guidance for improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in Africa. The Assembly of the African Union, by its decision 424 (XIX) adopted in July 2012, endorsed the recommendation for the institutionalization of a biennial meeting of African ministers responsible for civil registration.

41. Substantial progress was reported, including (a) constitution of a core group for coordinating the implementation of APAI-CRVS; (b) completion of a medium-term plan by the core group; (c) a comprehensive assessment of the civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa, through questionnaires; and (d) development of a clear and concise conceptual framework for APAI-CRVS.

42. The second conference of ministers responsible for civil registration was held on 6 and 7 September 2012 in Durban, South Africa, on the theme of improving civil registration and vital statistics institutional and human infrastructure. The conference was jointly organized by ECA, the African Union Commission, AfDB and the Government of South Africa, supported by the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees, the World Health Organization and the Health Metrics Network. The conference noted that the challenge now was to scale up efforts to reform and improve civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa. It recommended as a first step for each country to undertake a comprehensive assessment, followed by the development of a plan of action to strengthen their systems in a time-bound manner. The third conference will be organized by the African Union Commission in collaboration with partners in September 2014, in Abidjan.

I. Gender statistics

43. After the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing from 4 to 15 September 1995, many statistical offices around the world embarked on gender statistics programmes aimed at assessing gender gaps in various development dimensions and compiling and disseminating gender-responsive statistics and also undertaking statistical ventures on emerging gender issues. In recent years, several initiatives have been launched at the global level, including the Global Gender Statistics Programme, the Global Forum on Gender Statistics, which has been held thrice since 2007, and a coordination mechanism based on the activities of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics. These initiatives aim at exchanging knowledge and experience, developing gender statistics and indicators databases; developing training courses on gender statistics; and gathering best practices regarding legislation on gender statistics.

44. The AfDB gender statistics programme has largely focused on producing analytical studies concerning gender inequality in employment and other social surveys, and capacity-building in member countries to measure the gender asset and wealth gap in national households.

45. At continental level, there have been several initiatives on gender statistics aimed at advocating for gender-sensitive statistics; promoting gender mainstreaming in national statistical systems; exchanging best practices and experiences; and building capacity for the collection, compilation and dissemination of gender-related statistics. Significant steps have been taken in the measurement of inequality through the African Gender Development Index developed by ECA at its African Centre for Gender and Social Development and the undertaking of time-use surveys; the development of satellite accounts for household production; as the development of statistics on violence against women; and the establishment of the Gender Statistics Network. Moreover, the establishment of the African Group on Gender Statistics by the Statistical Commission for Africa has facilitated the coordination of the various activities on gender statistics in Africa.

46. For many years, various pan-African institutions, international agencies and other institutions have been undertaking various activities for the development of gender statistics on the continent. Such efforts, although they have contributed to achieving progress in the area of gender statistics both at the regional and country levels, were mostly project-based and largely ad hoc in nature and thus did not bring about sustainable improvements in the situation. There has been a long-felt need for the development and implementation of a common gender statistics programme for Africa. The current initiatives on development of gender statistics and those planned for the future by the regional organizations, international agencies and other

organizations in the region have now been brought under one umbrella programme, known as the African Programme on Gender Statistics. This will not only help make best use of resources but is also expected to make significant and sustainable improvements in gender statistics in Africa. Moreover, the development and implementation of the Programme is in line with ongoing efforts at the continental level to implement the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa. The Programme was adopted by the Statistical Commission for Africa during its third session, which directed the African Group on Gender Statistics to coordinate its implementation.

47. The African Programme on Gender Statistics (2012-2016) has been developed by all regional organizations, United Nations agencies and other international agencies. This plan includes all the key activities to be undertaken for a five-year period starting in 2012, grouped into four broad categories: regional partnership and coordination; capacity-building and research; reporting, storage and dissemination; and advocacy.

J. International Comparison Programme for Africa

48. The 2005 International Comparison Programme for Africa assisted participating countries in strengthening their capacity for compilation of economic statistics, consumer price indexes, GDP and related aggregates, and production of purchasing power parities. It also aided general statistical development in areas such as the design of the national strategy for the development of statistics. AfDB used the Programme as a springboard for its continent-wide statistical capacity-building programme.

49. The 2011 round of the Programme was launched in June 2010 and its activities officially kicked off in January 2011. The activities, which include training and technical assistance, can be divided into two main categories, namely, price statistics and national accounts. The Programme offered a platform for capacity-building in household consumption data collection and management.

K. Development indicators

50. The need for accurate and timely statistics for monitoring progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals has pressed African countries to produce indicators at much more frequent intervals now than ever before. These recent efforts have also provided African countries with the opportunity to strengthen the capacity of their national statistical systems to deliver reliable and timely information for evidence-based policy and programme formulation and for monitoring progress towards development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. There have been a number of efforts at the international, regional and national levels to strengthen national statistical capacities in order to improve the collection, compilation and dissemination of reliable and timely data on these indicators. Despite these efforts and progress made in this direction, African countries are still facing many statistical challenges, including continuing data gaps, data discrepancies between international and national data and between data obtained from different sources

within the country, mainly due to different concepts, definitions and methodologies; data dissemination and reporting; and data quality.

51. To better address these issues, the African Group on Development Indicators was set up in the framework of the Statistical Commission for Africa. The main objective of the Group is to support and advise the Statistical Commission for Africa in its quest to address challenges facing African countries on the monitoring of development indicators, particularly the Millennium Development Goals.

52. The African Group on Development Indicators is preparing to face these new challenges. While current efforts on capacity-building in the area of the collection, processing and dissemination will continue, it has to play a leadership role in the regional arena to in order to feed the potential post-2015 agenda.

53. At its third session, the Statistical Commission for Africa approved the following actions proposed by the African Group on Development Indicators: (a) inclusion of other United Nations agencies, regional economic communities and statistical training centres; (b) training of statistical personnel in national statistical offices in the use of various handbooks and manuals developed at the regional level; (c) improvement of metadata standards and writing of metadata; and (d) improvement of countries' mechanisms for reporting data, including data and metadata on Millennium Development Goals, in a systematic and uniform manner through a coordinated and uniform platform.

L. Infrastructure statistics

54. In 2009, the World Bank, in collaboration with AfDB and other partners, undertook the Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic, an ambitious project to analyse the cost of redressing the infrastructure deficit in 24 African countries, based on country-level information on various dimensions of infrastructure needs.

55. The successor programme to the Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic has been developed and covers the period 2010-2016. The implementation strategy sets out activities to be undertaken by the stakeholders. In 2011 the Africa Infrastructure Knowledge Programme handbook on infrastructure statistics was prepared, endorsed by the expert group meeting organized by AfDB in April 2011 and made ready for publication. It was presented to the Statistical Commission for Africa in January 2012. Many activities have been planned under the Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic, including data collection, data validation workshops, data analysis and generation of country reports and knowledge products on infrastructure.

56. The AfDB infrastructure statistics initiative under the Africa Infrastructure Knowledge Programme seeks to improve the infrastructure knowledge base to help monitor the impact of increased investment in the sector. The initiative represents an unprecedented effort to collect detailed economic and technical data on African infrastructure relating to the fiscal costs of each sector, future sector investment needs and sector performance indicators. The Programme has a long-term perspective and provides a framework for generating knowledge on infrastructure on a more sustainable basis.

M. Statistical data management and dissemination

57. Reliable statistics are needed to support accountability and transparency. Extensive use of data, especially for policy and decision-making, is very important for the sustainability and development of statistical systems. In this regard, it is critical to improve dissemination systems and pass information to users about available data and how to access and use them. At the continental level, the pan-African organizations — the African Union Commission, ECA and AfDB — jointly produce annually the *African Statistical Yearbook* and the report assessing progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in Africa. The overall objective is to develop a common database on development in Africa that draws from country sources.

58. The pan-African organizations have consistently experienced difficulties sourcing data from the majority of member States for regional-level decisions. As a result, they are constantly looking for ways to improve the situation. In December 2011, a meeting was held to discuss various issues related to data collection and management and made several recommendations, which the third session of the Statistical Commission for Africa was asked to consider. Among the recommendations are that ECA, the African Union, AfDB, regional economic communities, intergovernmental organizations and other regional organizations work together to improve data collection, and that national statistical offices increase their efforts to highlight the importance and the role of statistics in socioeconomic development as well as strengthen their data collection and dissemination functions, among others.

59. Among the main initiatives on data management and dissemination is the data portal and open data system in place at AfDB and the StatBase at ECA. These provide data centre services with easy and free access to the databases. Further, a data collection and management system is currently under development at AfDB and will be shared with other regional institutions and countries to facilitate data exchange and reduce the reporting burden on countries. As part of the third phase of its statistical capacity-building programme starting in 2012, AfDB plans to provide support to all African countries in setting up such systems to facilitate data dissemination and enable full public access to official statistics. This is in line with the Busan Action Plan for Statistics which was adopted by all development partners in December 2011.

N. Statistical training and human resources

60. One of the main challenges faced by national statistical systems in Africa is the lack of human resource to ensure effective statistical production and management. The African Group on Statistical Training and Human Resources was established in 2009 under the aegis of the Statistical Commission for Africa to coordinate various initiatives on statistical training in Africa. This was in response to the mushrooming of groups and initiatives on statistical training in Africa, a situation that was leading to inefficient use of scarce resources and duplication of efforts in pursuit of countries' capacity upgrading.

61. The main objective of the Group is to ensure the coordination of activities and initiatives in support of statistical training and human resources development in Africa. This coordination takes place at three different levels, namely, ongoing

activities and initiatives; project planning; and alignment of technical and financial partners' support to statistical training in Africa.

62. Since its establishment, the Group has carried out the following activities: analysis of the training component in national strategies for the development of statistics; updating lists of statistical training centres; an assessment of statistical training needs and capacities; strategy for harmonizing and standardizing training programmes and diplomas; establishment of an online portal; and the mentoring of young statisticians.

63. Even though progress has been made in coordination, there are still challenges facing the Group, including resource mobilization; activities done without any information forwarded to the ECA-based secretariat of the Group; limited existence of statistical training centres for African Portuguese-speaking countries; and language barriers impeding collaborative research activities and exchange programmes among different centres.

64. In July 2012, the African Union Assembly mandated the African Union Commission to establish an African Training Centre on Statistics (ATSC) to build capacity of African professionals working in the production of statistics and students using standardized curriculum.

O. Statistics for food security, sustainable agriculture and rural development

65. In order to respond to the declining quantity and quality of agricultural statistics in developing countries, a Global Strategy for Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics was developed and endorsed in February 2010 by the Statistical Commission. The purpose of the Global Strategy is to provide a framework and methodology that will lead to improvements in the availability and quality of national and international food and agricultural statistics, to guide policy analysis and decision-making in the 21st century.

66. Africa is the first region to develop and implement the Global Strategy. The Action Plan for Africa in the Global Strategy was designed in 2010 by AfDB, ECA, African Union Commission and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Action Plan adopts a long-term perspective (10 to 15 years) but will follow a phased approach, with the first phase covering the five-year period 2011-2015. The launching and training workshops on the Action Plan in general, and on the country assessment process of country needs and capacities in particular have been organized in June and August 2012 for the benefit of countries. The country assessment data compilation is currently underway and the related result report is expected in the course of 2013.

67. The next steps are to undertake work towards the integration of agricultural statistics into national strategies for the development of statistics and in-depth country assessment with the aim of developing national action plans.

III. Institutional framework for statistical development in Africa

A. Challenges

68. The African integration agenda, as outlined in treaties and protocols adopted by African Heads of State and Government, addresses three main areas, namely political integration, economic integration as well as social and cultural integration. For it to fully succeed, it requires not only quality statistical information, but also harmonized data across time and space.

69. In the past, it was realized by development policy and decision-makers as well as practitioners that deficiencies in statistical information in Africa were hampering Africa's development and integration processes. In particular, it was realized that although some significant progress had been made in statistical development in Africa due to several initiatives, the progress had been uneven and the African Statistical System still faced a number of challenges including the following, among others:

- The gap between data demand and supply, and in particular, inability of the African Statistical System to provide data on current and topical policy issues such as HIV/AIDS, environment and climate change, gender and more recently, food and financial crises
- Unsatisfactory quantity and quality of data and their use to foster development and integration
- Use of international statistical references and standards that do not always take into account African specificities (i.e. the nature of African economies, habits of local populations, etc.)
- Inadequate institutional capacity (values and norms, bureaucracy, performance management and accountability, etc.)
- Low levels of appreciation of the value and importance of statistics across society
- Inadequate political support, low priority and inadequate funding for statistics
- Inadequate coordination of statistical development work.

70. In addition, statistical harmonization programmes in regional economic communities vary from one region to another and hardly meet the demand for harmonized statistics. In response to concerns raised by stakeholders in the African statistical system in various forums about the said challenges and weaknesses, a number of initiatives, frameworks and strategies have been developed in the last ten years to improve statistics in support of Africa's development agenda.

B. Statistical Commission for Africa

71. The Statistical Commission for Africa was established by the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development in April 2007 as the apex inter-governmental body in charge of statistics and statistical development in the continent. Membership of the Statistical Commission for Africa comprises African countries as represented by their Directors General of national

statistical offices. The Statistical Commission for Africa is shepherding the statistical renaissance in Africa. It reports to the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and, like other regional statistical commissions, to the United Nations Statistical Commission. The Statistical Commission for Africa meets every two years.

72. The latest session of the Statistical Commission for Africa was held in Cape Town (South Africa) from 21 to 23 January 2012. The theme of the meeting was “Harmonizing Statistics in Support of Economic, Monetary and Social Integration in Africa.” The theme was chosen to highlight the role of statistics in the ongoing efforts towards economic, monetary and social integration in Africa. The meeting also reviewed the progress made in ongoing efforts to build the capacity of African countries to produce and use quality statistics in support of their development efforts.

C. Committee of Directors General of National Statistical Offices

73. Since 2006, the Committee of Directors General of National Statistical Offices has met every year under the aegis of the African Union to discuss statistical development issues in Africa, including the implementation of the African Charter on Statistics and the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa. It has been reporting to the African Union Conference of African Ministers of Economy and Finance since its inception and to the joint African Union-ECA conference since 2008. The Committee of Directors General and the Statistical Commission for Africa are both composed of the directors of national statistical offices, but reporting under different regulations and procedures.

74. In order to reduce the number of forums at continental level, it has been suggested that the Committee of Directors General be merged with the Statistical Commission for Africa to form a single forum, like the Statistical Commission. The merged forum would meet yearly and act as the steering committee for the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa and the African Charter on Statistics.

75. The latest meeting of the Committee of Directors General was held from 30 November to 2 December 2012 in Yamoussoukro in the framework of decision 423 (XIX) adopted by the Assembly of the African Union in July 2012, mandating the African Union Commission, in close consultation with member States and regional economic communities, to identify Africa’s priorities for the post-2015 development agenda in order to consider making 2015-2025 a decade of transformation for Africa. The objective of the meeting was to have the view of statisticians on the post-2015 development agenda and discuss the implementation of the Charter; the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa and its sectoral strategies for tracking Millennium Development Goals; and the African integration agenda. In addition, the meeting discussed the implementation of the 2012 summit decision on boosting intra-African trade, the proposed action plan for boosting intra-African trade and the framework for the fast-tracking of a continental free trade area and the establishment of an African trade observatory.

D. African Statistical Coordination Committee

76. At continental level, an African Statistical Coordination Committee was established in 2007 and is composed of the African Union Commission, AfDB, ECA, the Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT), the African Capacity-Building Foundation and regional economic communities. The Coordination Committee is ensuring the overall coordination of statistical initiatives at the continental level, including the implementation of the Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity-Building in Africa (see sect. F below), the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (see sect. F below), the national strategies for the development of statistics and follow-up on the Statistical Commission for Africa recommendations.

77. The Coordination Committee held its sixth meeting in Pretoria on 22 June 2012 and recommended that the joint secretariat (African Union Commission, ECA and AfDB) be strengthened, that resources be mobilized to support joint activities, and that a strategic document be developed on the importance of statistics to inform the African development outcomes to be discussed at the meeting of the Committee of Directors General of National Statistical Offices in Côte d'Ivoire (see para. 75 above) and the African Union summit in 2013.

E. Africa Symposium on Statistical Development

78. The Africa Symposium on Statistical Development is a country-led initiative aimed at providing a forum where African countries can discuss issues pertaining to their statistical development on a regionally-coordinated basis. The Symposium is organized in African countries on a rotational basis. It considers a number of aspects relating to developing sustainable statistical systems, addresses the challenges of capacity-building and provides a platform for a comprehensive exchange of practical experiences and best practices among African countries.

79. Between 2006 and 2011, six symposiums were organized successively in South Africa, Rwanda, Angola, Ghana, Senegal and Egypt on the theme of population and housing censuses. This effort resulted in improved participation of African countries in the 2010 round of population and housing censuses. At the seventh session, held in Cape Town, South Africa, in January 2012, it was decided that the Symposium should now focus on the development of civil registration and vital statistics systems in all countries across the continent for the next five years.

F. Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity-Building

80. The Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity-Building in Africa was designed in 2006 to provide strategic directions and appropriate mechanisms for guiding and accelerating the development of sustainable statistical capacity in Africa for managing for results, and for implementing the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics. As recommended by the Action Plan, the Strategic Framework has the design and implementation of the national strategies for the development of statistics as its overarching concern. The other objectives include invigorating statistical advocacy; mainstreaming statistics as a cross-cutting sector

in the development process; updating the legal and regulatory framework; assessing and prioritizing user needs; undertaking data development; fostering coordination, collaboration and partnerships; enhancing the statistical infrastructure; harnessing information and communication technology; developing human capital; improving data analysis; improving data dissemination; and improving funding for and sustainability of statistical systems.

81. The main challenge of the Strategic Framework remains its implementation, including the operationalization of its monitoring and reporting mechanism through the national strategies.

G. Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa

82. The Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa is a continental effort that directly responds to above challenges and supports the African integration agenda, particularly the Minimum Integration Programme adopted by the Heads of State and Government in July 2010 in Kampala. Its objective is to provide the African statistical system with a general framework for providing quality and harmonized statistics for the design and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation of integration and development policies in Africa. More specifically, the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa aims at identifying priority areas of the African integration process based on decisions taken at the highest level by African leaders, as well as policies and programmes implemented at regional and continental levels that need to be underpinned by statistics; assessing the state of the African statistical system and various initiatives on statistical harmonization both at regional and continental levels; and elaborating a continental strategy for the production and dissemination of quality harmonized statistics to inform the development and integration of Africa.

83. The African Union, ECA and AfDB have prepared an action plan for implementing the Strategy and some of its sectoral strategies. The action plan provides details on the expected outputs, activities, timeframe and responsibilities. Since the adoption of the Strategy, specialized technical groups have been established for each identified statistical area under the coordination and responsibility of a lead organization. In order to avoid duplication and to build on ongoing and existing efforts, the specialized technical groups correspond to the Statistical Commission for Africa working groups, albeit not a one-to-one correspondence. In areas where these working groups did not exist new technical groups have been created to deal with the relevant issues. These groups, comprising 20 to 25 members, are made up of statistics specialists and practitioners from member States, regional economic communities and specialized, regional and international agencies. Membership is on a voluntary basis and the specialized technical groups are expected to hold meetings at least twice a year. Fourteen technical groups are expected to be set up around the various identified statistical areas. Lead countries were identified on the basis of their ability to guide technical groups in the effective implementation of the Strategy.

H. African Charter on Statistics

84. The African Charter on Statistics was endorsed by the 12th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in February 2009. The Charter will work as a tool for statistical advocacy at the highest level of government and commit African Governments to scale up support to statistics, develop statistics in a manner consistent with best practice and international standards and use statistics for policy development and decision-making at all levels.

85. Since the adoption of the Charter, 22 African Union member States have signed it and only six have ratified it.

86. The African Union Commission has undertaken consultative missions to advocate for ratification and endorsement of the Charter in many countries. Advocacy documents were developed in order to popularize the Charter and ensure ownership by all stakeholders with the support of the World Bank. National statistical offices in their capacity as coordinators of national statistical systems were expected to popularize the Charter in their respective countries, using appropriate means and documents which were provided to them.

87. Effective implementation of the African Charter on Statistics and the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa and its sectoral strategies is expected to provide credible and harmonized data that are produced regularly and cover political, economic, social and cultural dimensions of the African integration process. The challenges of producing quality statistics remain huge and are beyond the reach of individual institutions and countries.

88. Eight peer reviews have been conducted by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21), the African Union Commission and AFRISTAT in collaboration with member States to evaluate to what extent the statistical system is compliant with the principles of the African Charter on Statistics. The African Union Commission, with support from Statistics South Africa and AfDB, has developed methodological guidelines for the elaboration of national statistics acts based on the African Charter on Statistics, analysis of national statistics gaps in relation to Charter's principles and a pattern law for African countries based on the principles of the Charter.

I. Statistical programmes of regional economic communities

89. Different regional economic communities have developed medium-to-long-term statistical programmes expected to support regional integration by making available relevant, timely and accurate statistical information to be used in the region for planning, policy formulation, protocol monitoring and decision-making. The programmes generally focus on the availability of harmonized, comparable, reliable and up-to-date core statistics in the economic and social areas.

90. Regional economic communities such as ECOWAS have identified five priority areas: harmonization of national accounts, harmonized consumer price indices, harmonization of balance of payments statistics, environmental statistics and agriculture information systems. They have also developed statistical guides to assist countries in producing and reporting on these priority areas on a regular basis.

ECOWAS is also working towards developing a pool fund to support generation of statistics in the priority areas and other areas of national interest at the country level, with ECOWAS taking charge of mobilization of resources for activities at the subregional level. The large number of subregional groupings means that coordination and consultation have to occur at various levels to ensure consistency in statistical information produced at all levels.

J. National strategies for the development of statistics

91. There is consensus internationally about the need for a holistic, strategic approach to improving national statistical systems and building statistical capacity to provide the information needed for development programmes. The Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics was even more specific in identifying the mainstreaming of strategic planning of statistical systems and the preparation of national statistical development strategies for all low-income countries by 2006 as priority actions. As was mentioned earlier, national strategies for the development of statistics are the overarching strategies of the Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity-Building in Africa.

92. The national strategy for the development of statistics is essentially a second generation of statistical plans that provides a comprehensive framework for statistical development at national level. It provides for, among other things:

- (a) Statistical advocacy to create greater awareness about the role of statistics and enhance demand for and use of statistics;
- (b) Partnerships for statistical development among producers and users of statistics as well as donor harmonization;
- (c) A vision of where the national statistical system should be in the medium to long term;
- (d) A “road map” and “milestones” for getting there and a base from which progress can be measured;
- (e) A mechanism for informed change when needed;
- (f) Continual assessment of ever-changing user needs for statistics and for building needed capacity to meet these needs in a more coordinated, synergic and efficient manner;
- (g) A framework to support production and use of better statistics now, and to accelerate sustainable statistical capacity building for the future;
- (h) Good communication, feedback and learning, all of which are essential for organizational growth and performance enhancement;
- (i) Mobilizing, harnessing and leveraging resources (both national and international); galvanizing individual energies into total effort; the creation of quality awareness and enhancement of national statistics;
- (j) Forward thinking and organizational learning;
- (k) Introduction of modern and proven strategic planning and management principles and good practices in the handling of official statistics.

93. More than half of the African countries are implementing national strategies for the development of statistics or their equivalent and other countries are at different stages of designing or updating theirs. The reviews of strategies across countries has shown that even if their preparation used a participatory process involving all stakeholders of the national statistical system, the main challenge remains their funding by African Governments and development partners.

IV. Actions to be taken by the Statistical Commission

94. **The Commission may wish to consider the following possible actions:**

(a) **Taking note of the ongoing progress made by African countries with the support of pan-African organizations (ECA, the African Union Commission and AfDB) and other partners to accelerate the development of statistics in support of their development efforts;**

(b) **Calling upon African countries and development partners to give high priority to statistics in their development programmes and to support the mainstreaming of statistics in country development processes, including growth and poverty reduction strategies;**

(c) **Calling upon all African countries to improve the implementation of their national strategies for the development of statistics and African Governments and development partners to scale up their assistance in providing the needed technical and financial support for the implementation of the national strategies for the development of statistics;**

(d) **Calling upon development partners to support African countries through coordination mechanisms put in place by African stakeholders, namely the Statistical Commission for Africa , the Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity-Building in Africa and the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa.**