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Report of the World Bank and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century on statistical development

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2013/235, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the progress report of the World Bank and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century on efforts to develop a plan of action on statistical development. The Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 29 November to 1 December 2011, considered and endorsed a programme of action for statistics. The objectives were to fully integrate statistics in decision-making; to promote open access to statistics; and to increase resources for statistical systems. The global action plan, known as the Busan Action Plan for Statistics, builds on the success of the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics and was endorsed by the Statistical Commission. To achieve its objectives, the Busan Action Plan outlines five steps needed to strengthen national statistical systems in developing countries and to increase the effectiveness of the support provided by development partners. It provides early momentum for efforts to improve development data for the post-2015 process, in particular to improve baselines for targets as soon as January 2016. The Commission is invited to note the progress made to implement the Busan Action Plan since its endorsement.

* [E/CN.3/2014/1](#).



Report of the World Bank and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century on statistical development

I. Introduction

1. At the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 29 November to 1 December 2011, Heads of State, ministers and other representatives of developing and developed countries reaffirmed their commitment to effective international development. In doing so, they noted the need for transparent, country-led and country-level results frameworks based on a manageable number of output and outcome indicators.

2. In support of the broad objectives of greater transparency, accountability and sustainable results, the Forum received and endorsed a global action plan for statistics, the Busan Action Plan for Statistics, which proposed five priority areas for action that contribute to large and sustainable improvements in statistical capacity. In each case, programmes of action were to be accompanied by indicators to monitor progress and measure results.

3. Like its predecessor, the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics, which aimed to improve the quality and coverage of indicators for the Millennium Development Goals, the Busan Action Plan for Statistics recognized the complementary roles of developing countries, bilateral development partners and international agencies. It encouraged a coordinated system-wide approach to capacity development and maintained that aid aligned with the statistical development strategies of countries would be more effective than ad hoc, donor-initiated capacity development and data collection efforts. Improvements in country statistical systems would further improve international statistics, while a more effective international system would provide more consistent advice and better support for national activities. The five priority areas of the Busan Action Plan are as follows:

(a) Action 1: Strengthen and refocus national and regional statistical strategies with particular emphasis on improving statistical systems that address country-level development priorities. A key aim is to increase in-country capacity to respond to emerging and unforeseen needs. Strategies should be updated to reflect new challenges and opportunities while integrating international and domestic data collection activities;

(b) Action 2: Implement standards for data preservation, documentation and dissemination that permit broader public access to statistics;

(c) Action 3: Develop programmes to increase the knowledge and skills needed in order to use statistics effectively for planning, analysis, monitoring and evaluation, thus increasing transparency and accountability, and improving the accessibility of statistics at the national and international levels;

(d) Action 4: Build and maintain results-monitoring instruments to track the outcomes of all global summits and high-level forums. Rigorous monitoring of global initiatives requires collaboration between national and international statistical organizations. Outcome documents should specifically recognize the need for statistical capacity development, including technical assistance, training and financial support;

(e) Action 5: Ensure that financing for statistical information is robust and that funding instruments and approaches reflect the new modalities and actors in development finance.

4. The improvements effected in official statistics under the Marrakech Action Plan were widely noted. However, the Busan Action Plan was the first statistical action plan to receive explicit global endorsement at the highest political levels. Statistical capacity was a consistent theme throughout the discussions held at both the technical and political levels. As such, the endorsement of the Busan Action Plan may be seen as an expression of confidence in the ability of the international statistical community to ensure the continuation of its progress in the future.

5. Discussions at the forty-third session of the Statistical Commission, held from 28 February to 2 March 2012, on the contents and priorities of the Busan Action Plan complemented the high-level political endorsement secured at Busan. In its decision 43/113, the Commission endorsed the objectives of the Busan Action Plan for Statistics and the five steps needed to strengthen national statistical systems in developing countries, urged that the plan of implementation be flexible and urged the global community to provide sustained support for the full implementation of the Plan through the adoption of a coordinated and consultative approach. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to review the progress in the implementation of the Busan Action Plan at its session in 2014.

II. Status of implementation

Initial actions following endorsement by the Commission of the Busan Action Plan

6. It was acknowledged that in order to implement the Busan Action Plan a substantial effort and investment would be required across the range of development actors, with developing countries playing a leadership role. Implementation would be based on shared principles — consistent with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Ownership, Harmonization, Alignment, Results and Mutual Accountability and reaffirmed at Busan — that form the foundation of effective and cooperative development. Implementation steps would recognize that fragile States and small island developing States have special needs and may require different, perhaps phased, approaches to capacity development and institution-building. Implementation would also need to reflect the increasing diversity of the development partnership in terms of financial support, knowledge exchange and sources of technical advice.

7. The following criteria would need to be met for implementation:

(a) Existence of broad international support and identification of a lead agency/partnership/institution to support in-country leadership of national implementation strategies;

(b) In-country capacity development (not building international bureaucracies) as the primary focus;

(c) Outcomes that are identifiable, can be monitored and are time bound;

(d) Implementation that is “bureaucracy light” and relies on existing partnerships, agencies and institutions.

8. At the country level, implementation priorities would be determined by national strategies for the development of statistics and their associated implementation plans. At the regional levels, implementation priorities would be aligned with the five actions set out in the Busan Action Plan, with emphasis on data preservation and dissemination, piloting innovative approaches to collecting high frequency statistics, strengthening skills to support the use of statistics and supporting sectoral/thematic initiatives that remain underfunded, such as implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts and vital registration systems. Regional and international implementation activities would focus on areas where there are clear economies of scale or a public good justification for action. The aim would be to build on and make use of existing institutions and instruments and avoid adding to overhead.

9. Pursuant to decision 43/113, in which the Commission urged that the plan be flexible, taking into account country-specific development capacity and statistical priorities, and be undertaken in collaboration with international agencies and development partners, the implementation road map does not identify an exhaustive set of activities up front or designate an agency as exclusively responsible for implementing a particular action. Rather, the implementation road map has adopted a “rolling approach”, incorporating new priorities as required and when they are sufficiently mature. The road map will be revised as priorities shift, new methodologies and technologies emerge, and successful programmes become fully mainstreamed in the day-to-day operations of the statistical system.

10. After an initial set of consultations, the following early implementation steps have been taken:

(a) As a priority under action 1 of the Busan Action Plan, national strategies for the development of statistics have been refocused and implemented. The guidelines for the improvements — national strategies that are more selective and the preparation of realistic and achievable improvement plans — have been finalized under the leadership of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21). It is essential for sector priorities, such as agriculture and gender statistics to be integrated within updated national strategies that are consistent with country needs and implementation capacity. The new guidelines provide specific suggestions in those and other areas, which can be found on the dedicated website (<http://nsdsguidelines.paris21.org>);

(b) Helping countries to put open data initiatives into effect has supported action 2 of the Busan Action Plan by increasing public access to statistics. A framework supporting the roll-out to developing countries of the open data initiative has been prepared by the World Bank, building on what has already been achieved by the International Household Survey Network and the Accelerated Data Program. As part of that framework, a partnership involving the Open Knowledge Foundation, the Open Data Institute and the World Bank has developed an open data readiness assessment tool for conducting an action-oriented assessment of the readiness of a Government — or even an individual agency — to evaluate, design and implement an open data initiative. Initial pilots have been conducted in Ulyanovsk oblast (Russian Federation) and in Antigua and Barbuda. Such tools assess readiness across the following dimensions: (i) political leadership;

(ii) policy/legal framework; (iii) institutional structures; (iv) data within Governments; (v) demand for data and citizen engagement; (vi) open data ecosystems; (vii) financing; and (viii) information technology infrastructure. The work is expanding to cover five to seven countries per year for the next three years;

(c) In working towards developing new partnerships under the Busan Action Plan, the World Bank and the Government of the Russian Federation have established a multi-donor trust fund, ECASTAT, to support statistical capacity-building in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. It is a highly flexible fund that finances topical regional programmes, improving data openness and country-specific capacity-building programmes;

(d) Another important new partnership that has developed is the Evidence and Data for Gender Equality Initiative, launched by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)/Statistics Division to develop and improve comparable gender indicators on education, employment, entrepreneurship and assets (see [E/CN.3/2014/18](#)). The specific implementation steps that involve training and technical assistance are being developed by UN-Women and the Statistics Division in close collaboration with such key partners as the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the regional commissions and other regional institutions, and the representatives of national statistical systems;

(e) The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has coordinated the implementation of the Global Strategy for Agriculture Statistics. Significant funding has been committed to research, country assessments and capacity-building, which is being coordinated by regional agencies such as the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the African Development Bank. The work is in keeping with the principles set out in the Busan Action Plan since statistical capacity priorities will be developed through the national strategies for the development of statistics process;

(f) The United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management has been launched in order to effectively manage and utilize geospatial information and resources. The advancement of geospatial information and its integration with statistical information represent a step towards establishing a global information infrastructure for pooling together multiple layers of data sources with an explicit spatial reference framework that is in keeping with actions 2 and 3 of the Busan Action Plan (see also [E/CN.3/2014/31](#));

(g) In order to support action 3 of the Busan Action Plan, PARIS21 has organized several user-producer dialogues between national statistical offices and various user groups, ranging from planning ministries of countries in the Southern African Development Community to journalists in Côte d'Ivoire. In other countries, such as Burundi and Cambodia, several user groups were represented. Such dialogues allow the respective communities to identify priority areas of action to improve user-producer interaction and, ultimately, the use of statistics in decision-making;

(h) PARIS21 to monitor financial commitments to statistical development through the Partnership's partner report on support to statistics, which supports action 5 of the Busan Action Plan. Such a financial monitoring tool also offers

insights into some of the challenges of delivering that financial support according to the nationally agreed priorities of recipients.

11. In keeping with the implementation principles contained in the Busan Action Plan, governance is based on an inclusive development partnership built around existing institutions, partnerships and agencies. As PARIS21 has already served as a global forum for sharing knowledge and for coordinating support for statistics, it has been strengthened to play the role of the secretariat for the Busan Action Plan, collecting information about national, regional and international activities, assisting in regional and international coordination and preparing reports on financing, outcomes and lessons learned.

Further implementation momentum from the post-2015 development agenda

12. The Millennium Development Goals represented a commitment made by Member States and United Nations entities to fostering a more effective, results-oriented development partnership in the twenty-first century. Since their adoption, dozens of developing country planning ministries, hundreds of international agencies and thousands of civil society organizations have rallied behind them, contributing to remarkable achievements: 1 billion fewer people in extreme poverty and about 3 million children's lives saved each year; four out of five children now get vaccinated for a range of diseases; maternal mortality gets the focused attention it deserves; and deaths from malaria reduced by one quarter. Contracting HIV is no longer an automatic death sentence. In 2011, 610 million children in developing countries — a record number — attended primary school.

13. While providing a yardstick against which to measure development outcomes, the Goals have also stimulated demand for better statistics with which to measure progress and for new programmes to increase the capacity of developing countries to produce statistics and to use statistics in policymaking and programme management. The global community has responded to those demands by creating new partnerships and mobilizing additional resources to provide support for statistics in developing countries. The result has been a marked improvement in the quality and availability of statistics on core development outcomes such as poverty and income distribution; school enrolments; mortality and morbidity rates; and environmental conditions.

14. Given the successes of the Goals, political leaders have recognized that it would be a mistake to start a new development agenda from scratch. They have also recognized that, despite the progress made in the past decade, national data systems, which are the primary producers of most statistical information, face immense challenges. Just as the efforts to monitor the Goals have stimulated a decade-long effort to improve national systems, the demand for improved and accessible statistics to monitor post-2015 development goals will provide the stimulus to continue those efforts.

15. Consistent with the approach of the Busan Action Plan — to improve data quality, scope and accessibility through innovative techniques and opportunistic implementation — there is now a broad political call to accelerate efforts to improve post-2015 development data. Some have argued for a new global partnership on development data that would bring together diverse but interested stakeholders, such

as Government statistical offices, international organizations, civil society organizations, foundations and the private sector. Such a partnership would develop strategies to fill critical gaps, expand data accessibility and galvanize international efforts to ensure that a baseline for post-2015 targets is in place by January 2016.

16. Although the contours of the partnership are under development, efforts are under way to develop a vision for strengthening development data as a parallel track to the post-2015 development agenda. The intention is to change the way data is collected and used at every level — from individuals to the Secretary-General. To realize that ambition, efforts will need to include, as well as reach beyond, the improvement of official statistics and leverage, for example, the potential of open data to deliver more usable information. This means delivering a data revolution for the following purposes:

(a) To empower citizens and communities with the information and skills they need to create locally owned solutions to the daily and long-term challenges they face and build local capacity to analyse and interpret data;

(b) To enable national Governments and institutions to make better/more evidence-informed policy decisions — enhance national capacity to understand development challenges through better data in order to design national plans in a more effective way;

(c) To provide the international community with comparable information to track, monitor and implement progress towards the post-2015 development goals, including to ensure that robust, comparable metrics and baselines are in place for the next set of development goals.

17. With the data revolution taking shape, multilateral development banks, the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund have already begun to improve their collaboration on development data. The process was launched on 19 April 2013, when the heads of those institutions signed a memorandum of understanding that sets out the basis for enhanced collaboration in statistical activities. As such, the memorandum of understanding is part of the global response to the evidence focus of the post-2015 development agenda.

18. The memorandum of understanding will guide enhanced collaboration to support countries and facilitate inter-agency sharing of data, tools, standards and analysis in order to improve data for monitoring development outcomes. When working with member countries, the agencies will be guided by the following principles:

(a) Collaborate on exploring effective ways to coordinate support at the country level;

(b) Respect country ownership and leadership by supporting prioritized and realistic national work programmes for data production, accessibility and usability;

(c) Improve the coordination of data collection;

(d) Deliver harmonized support for capacity-building;

(e) Raise awareness and promote the use of development data;

(f) Strive to increase user satisfaction by enhancing the quality and usability of statistical information.

19. On 13 October 2013, the partners involved endorsed the following four concrete areas of collaboration — areas that could significantly benefit from the collaborative efforts of multilateral development banks to fill data gaps, improve measurements and improve their processes:

(a) Take actions to influence political discourse on global partnerships to improve data;

(b) Address difficult gaps in data production and accessibility related to standardized measures of household well-being, sustainability measures, the system of national accounts and administrative data systems for statistical use;

(c) Strengthen knowledge-sharing on innovative approaches to data production and improve data accessibility;

(d) Support the Global Poverty Statistics Board.

20. Such actions recognize that development data needs cannot be met by agencies working in parallel or alone and that the signatory agencies of the memorandum of understanding are collectively an important force to shape the post-2015 data agenda, mobilize technical and financial support and foster coherent actions on the donor spectrum.

21. In order to engage a broader set of actors in the data revolution, PARIS21 has launched a 22-month project entitled “Informing a data revolution”, with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The project aims to strengthen the means by which human progress is measured, and in particular to identify concrete actions to improve the quality, reliability, availability and timeliness of data and statistics. More specifically, the project aims to increase the understanding of data systems through a stock-taking exercise of 10 countries, identifying replicable interventions that, as a whole, constitute a road map for the data revolution, and build a coalition of actors willing to implement the road map.

22. Partners, stakeholders and individuals have provided important input on the priority areas to be addressed through a series of multi-stakeholder dialogues facilitated by PARIS21, including a side event at the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly. A key aspect of that project is that it furthers opportunities to gather comments and feedback as work towards the development of the road map progresses.

III. Next steps

23. In order to ensure that there is broad political support for improving development data, the evolving new partnership must include a broader breadth of collaborators and activities than had been identified for the Millennium Development Goals. However, statistical agencies at both the national and international levels need to remain active and engaged in shaping the partnership in order to ensure that capacity-building plans take into consideration lessons learned and that they are sustainable and technically sound.