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Transformative agenda for official statistics

Background document
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**Report of the African Conference on a transformative agenda for official statistics
Libreville, Gabon, 21-22 November 2015**

Prepared by United Nations Statistics Division

African Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics

Libreville, Gabon, 21-22 November 2015

REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE



Canada 

Conclusions and recommendations

The African Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics, held on 21-22 November 2015 in Libreville, Gabon, was the first of a series of regional conferences and built on the outcome of the High-Level Global Conference organised by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and Eurostat in January 2015 in New York and the recognition by the 46th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission of the emerging demands for high-quality statistics and the need for modernisation of national regional and international statistical systems.

The Conference was organised back-to-back with the 11th African Symposium for Statistical Development (ASSD) and the 9th Committee of Directors General of National Statistics Office. The Conference, co-organised by the African Development Bank (AfDB), Statistics Canada (StatCan) and UNSD, with the support of the African Centre for Statistics (ACS), the African Union (AU) and Eurostat, aimed at taking stock of various international, regional and national initiatives for integrating and modernising statistical systems, and shaping the global initiative for a Transformative Agenda to the African context. African countries steered this event for which substantial time was assigned to group discussions and plenary interventions covering the 5 thematic areas of the Transformative Agenda. Heads of national statistical offices of 49 countries in Africa participated in the Conference. Chief statisticians and senior managers of international and regional organisations, multilateral and bilateral partners, and other stakeholders were also invited to attend. In total, more than 90 participants attended the Conference.

The Conference also allowed for the presentation of the outcome and achievements of the concluding International Statistical Fellowship Programme (ISFP) for Africa. The ISFP is a programme financed by Global Affairs Canada (formerly the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada) and implemented by Statistics Canada to share knowledge and good practices with statisticians from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean on institutional arrangement, organisational structure and management of national statistical offices with the transformation towards integrated statistical systems in mind.

The agenda of the African Conference is provided in the annex. Documents of the conference are available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/workshops/2015/gabon/lod.asp>.

At the opening of the Conference, it was decided to start with a more in-depth discussion of the Transformative Agenda in the context of the African Agenda 2063, the Africa Data Consensus, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals and indicators. Presentations and discussions of the outcome and conclusions of the Conference were rescheduled to Monday 23 November, immediately after the opening of the 11th ASSD. This allowed for linking the Transformative Agenda to the future ASSD agenda on modernization of the African statistical systems to meet the future demands including the indicators for the monitoring of progress against the SDGs and the Agenda 2063. A first breakout session was organised with the aim of exploring the alignment of and differences between the goals and related indicators for the SDG framework and the Agenda 2063.

First thematic area: Coordination at and between the global, continental, (sub-) regional and national statistical systems

The presentations and discussions under this thematic focused on the identification of the main drivers for the transformation and modernization of national statistical systems in Africa but also on how the main global drivers may differ from the regional and national ones for the African continent. Breakout sessions also discussed how current and future National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) should be respectively revised and revamped to become catalysts for the transformation and modernization of national statistical systems. The role of global assessments and peer reviews in respect to the assessment of the level of maturity of national statistical systems in regards to modernisation and integration was also addressed along with the coordination mechanisms and tools that could and should be put in place to get gradually the Pan-African institutions to lead and coordinate the process of modernization and integration of statistics.

Participants stressed that drivers for the transformation of national statistical systems on the African continent are generally the same as those identified at the global level but geared towards more specific needs such as the Agenda 2063, the Africa Data Consensus, the African Charter on Statistics and the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA).

The main conclusions and recommendations for this thematic area were the following:

- Advancing the alignment of the 2063, the 2030 and the transformative agendas to support the establishment of an integrated funded programme consisting of actions for the 5 cross-cutting functional components of the transformative agenda;
- Promoting and maintaining a high level political commitment to develop and sustain sound institutional and organisational frameworks for the production of official statistics at the level of the continent, the (sub-) regions and the countries (Agenda 2063) based on common statistical corporate business architecture and mainstreaming the international statistical standards and principles of official statistics;
- Recognizing on the national levels the national statistical offices as the central coordinators not only for the production of statistics but beyond that also for the design and implementation of the new statistical production architecture including for the national geo-referenced social, economic and spatial information system. Also recognizing the leadership of heads of statistics as a driving force for the transformation to take place;
- Incorporating into the guidelines for NSDS, presently under revision, reflections and recommendations about the transformation of official statistics aiming at facilitating the establishment of concrete national roadmaps (operational programmes) for modernisation and integration of statistics aligned with national, regional, continental and global development agendas;
- Introducing a strong governance and coordination mechanism at the African continent level such as a High-level Steering Committee on the Transformative Agenda led by the Pan-African institutions that would articulate and implement a coordinated *5 thematic areas* programme for the transformation and modernization of official statistics in the context of the 2063, SHaSa and 2030 Agendas;

- Strengthening the leadership of the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) to ensure proper integration of the African initiatives in the global statistical system and related strategies;
- Incorporating the development of specific *5 thematic areas* cross cutting programs for African countries at (sub-) regional level aiming at deepening and sharing good practices, knowledge and tools on the transformation and modernization of national statistical systems;
- Recognizing the importance of south-south cooperation in fostering and sharing innovative solutions to challenges and constraints affecting developing countries specifically.

Second thematic area: Communication and advocacy

For the purpose of the African Conference the thematic area on communication and advocacy was discussed in the same session as the first thematic area (coordination at and between the global, continental, (sub-) regional and national statistical systems). Participants reflected on how a targeted communication and advocacy strategy on the value of and principles for official statistics could redress the situation of insufficient funding and dependence on external sources; tenuous institutional and legal statistical frameworks, fragile data governance and accountability; lack of timely, accurate, comparable and relevant data; and weak demand and capacity in the use of data for decision making at (sub-) regional, national and local level. Breakout groups also discussed and reported on the key elements and themes to be advanced in the African communication and advocacy strategy for official statistics to promote the transformation and modernization of the national statistics systems taking into account the different levels of maturity.

The main conclusions and recommendations for this thematic area were the following:

- Recognizing that the momentum is right to attract the proper attention to modernization of statistics and to advocate for an active participation of official statisticians in the design, implementation and evaluation of development strategies;
- Aligning global, (sub-) regional and national communication strategies and programmes aiming at addressing the value of official statistics at different level of maturity;
- Advocating for the rather limited investments and operational costs for developing and maintaining adequate statistical capacities in comparison with the positive impact of statistics and indicators for evidence-based decision making; in particular with the monitoring of the progress towards the objectives of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Agenda 2063;
- Engaging policy makers and other stakeholders through enhanced communication strategies and advocacy for the appropriation of the necessary financial and human resources, infrastructure and technologies from national own resources for a sustainable transformation and modernisation of statistical capacities;
- Addressing the issue of high staff turnover by ensuring competitive remuneration and other non-monetary compensations in order to secure human resources and skills to drive and contribute to the transformation and modernisation of national statistical systems;

- Improving partnership with the data communities, data producers and users, and other stakeholders aiming at promoting and sustaining the modernisation and integration of statistics.

Third thematic area: Innovation and modernization through standard-based statistical business architecture

The presentations and discussions under this thematic area explored different scenarios for harnessing the innovative and transformational power of ICT. In that respect the discussions tackled the issue of formulating an innovation and modernisation strategy for official statistics at national level and the role of the global and regional statistical systems to advance this vision, including the development and sharing of common survey methodologies and IT tools. Participants also discussed the modalities for the transfer and sharing of technological and managerial skills on modern and innovative data collection, production and dissemination technology at and between the national, sub-regional, regional and global level.

Participants acknowledged that in order to support modernisation and integration, statistical production processes and tools should be based on a common and collaborative statistical corporate business architecture. This architecture should reflect not only the traditional socio-economic information system of national statistics but should fully involve the national spatial information system. The latter should include also the geo-referencing of socio-economic and environmental information. This would facilitate the integration of surveys, the use of alternative/complementary data sources, the exploitation of geo-referenced information systems as well as the development of an articulated and coherent metadata repository.

Finally in terms of dissemination and access to statistics, participants mentioned that the latest technological developments would allow the development of “statistical clouds/data hubs” of anonymised micro data addressing the demand from researchers and the international community for more disaggregated information. The initiative for the establishment of African centres of excellence and the creation of modern regional data labs for joint development of IT applications and training were also mentioned as positive developments in support of the modernisation and integration of official statistics.

The main outcome and conclusions for this thematic area were the following:

- Mapping existing business processes, technology architecture, information systems and capabilities using available generic tools such as those developed under the auspices of the High-level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics, for example the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM);
- Advancing standardisation of the components of statistical production within and across national statistical systems using for example the Common Statistical Production Architecture (CSPA) that provides principles and guidelines for mainstreaming statistical processes and for creating the favourable environment for the implementation of standardised IT infrastructure initiatives such as the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA);
- Fostering the development of mobile devices and other e-data collection and processing technologies aiming at realising cost efficiencies, improving effectiveness, securing timeliness and data quality as well as reducing response burden;

- Developing continental and/or regional repositories of open software with dedicated deployment and operational support (e.g. helpdesk);
- Exploring the feasibility of continental and/or regional centres in charge of maintaining and lending hardware and mobile devices for temporary deployment in the framework of specific data collection and processing activities such as population, housing, agricultural and business census operations;
- Fostering the development and the deployment of innovative and user-friendly data extraction and visualization tools (e.g. mobile devices apps) to extend the outreach of official statistics and facilitate their understanding and interpretation;
- Establishing common data and metadata portals and exploring practices of cloud computing considering the open data concept. In that perspective, exploring the idea of mainstreaming statistical data and metadata exchange standards such as SDMX and HTML;
- Developing dedicated facilities that focus on the training of the staff of the statistical offices that supports the environment of a modern statistical office as sketched in the indents above with a combination of IT skills, analytical abilities and domain knowledge (see also below, fifth thematic area: capacity building and training).

Fourth thematic area: Integrated statistical systems

The session of the African Conference dealing with integrated statistical systems relied on the outcome and achievements of the International Statistical Fellowship Programme (ISFP) conducted by Statistics Canada and aiming at enlightening few areas in which national statistical systems need to invest to secure the proper foundations to modernisation. This session was organised according to a different setup, allowing some African countries to present and share their successes and challenges in securing the foundations for the modernisation and integration of national statistical systems.

It was stressed that the transformative agenda calls upon more integrated statistical systems and moving away from traditional ‘silo’ approach of statistical agencies and related production processes. It was mentioned that leadership and coordination mechanisms and tools at the institutional, management and technical levels, are key factors to ensure efficiency and coherence within a national statistical system. Furthermore it was acknowledged that strategic development plans such as NSDSs and masterplans are the proper vehicles to set up the road maps to modernisation. These strategies should be however translated into operational programmes and be complemented by monitoring and evaluation tools and mechanisms. These strategic and operational programmes should be complemented with initiatives for the recruitment, development and retention of human resources (human capital) and continuous efforts to develop the technical infrastructure and information technology.

It was recognised that continuous communication from the top management within and outside the national statistical office about the needs for and benefits of integration and modernisation is needed to secure the adherence to the transformation and sustain an efficient and effective implementation of these strategies. Though, participants emphasised that the challenge would be to conduct in parallel a transformation of official statistics, while responding quickly to new emerging demands and securing at the same time the production of traditional statistical information. One solution that was discussed to

overcome this challenge and enhance the integration would be to setup specialized horizontal corporate services units for planning and monitoring, methodology and processes, and IT services that would steer the integration process with the participation of production units but without overloading them.

It was also stressed that proper quality management framework and practices are required to ensure that throughout the modernisation process, statistical information remains fit-for-purpose. Participants further insisted on the fact that quality considerations should support the modernisation process and therefore be embedded in any initiative and strategy related to the transformation of official statistics. It was suggested that every national statistical office should setup a specialised quality assurance unit that would develop and promote quality assurance frameworks and supervise their implementations.

It was also acknowledged that the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics initiative would further extend the use of administrative registers for the production of official statistics but that more efforts were needed to fully exploit the potential of administrative data as complementary information source for the compilation of statistics. Participants agreed that some specific actions should be taken at regional and sub-regional level to standardise, and harmonise administrative data and metadata, transmission protocols and nomenclatures across African countries. It was also recognised that the potential of Big Data should be carefully explored at global and regional level but that ultimately such secondary data sources would not fully replace traditional statistical data harvested through surveys and census but rather complement them. An issue of concern was however how to engage with third party information (both public and private) while maintaining public trust in Official Statistics without compromising the adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and in particular undermining the reputation for independence, objectivity and confidentiality.

The main conclusions and recommendations for this thematic area can be summarised as follows:

- Fostering institutional arrangements of national statistical systems with the aim to enhance adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the African Charter on Statistics such as governance and coordination, professional independence and objectivity, confidentiality, effectiveness and efficiency, access to secondary data sources and quality assurance frameworks;
- Adopting a corporate management approach of statistical activities and gradually introducing cross-functional corporate services units in the national statistical agencies for planning and monitoring, methodology, quality assurance, data collection, and IT services;
- Adopting and implementing comprehensive quality management and monitoring policies at continental, (sub-) regional and national level based on internationally agreed quality assurance frameworks such as the IMF Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF) and the UNSD Generic National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF);
- Developing a comprehensive human resource policy in order to attract and retain know-how that can contribute to the modernisation and integration of statistics such as data scientists, IT specialists and change managers;
- Mainstreaming integrated and metadata driven data collection, processing and dissemination programmes for environment, social, demographic and business statistics using as much as possible

the potential of administrative data. Exploring the potential of Big Data for the production of integrated official statistics as a complement to traditional data sources;

- Advancing the access to and dissemination of anonymised microdata for population, household and business censuses and surveys, in particular for research purposes;
- Promoting the role of the national statistical office as the main coordinating entity in the activities on the integration going beyond the activities of the national statistical institute covering work of other organisation responsible for official statistics in the country.

Fifth thematic area: Capacity building and training

The presentations and considerations under the thematic area *capacity building and training* explored the way technical capacity building and modes of cooperation could better take into consideration the different level of maturity of national statistical systems. It was also emphasised in this session that in some cases the national statistical office should take a stronger coordination role within the national statistical system and ensure that technical capacity building and cooperation activities to be less donor oriented and more demand driven. It was mentioned that gradually African countries should be in a position to secure proper funding of statistical activities and development.

Participants recognised that transformation is not only IT driven but mainly relies on human capital and discussed the gap between available abilities and what should be the “profile” of employees of national statistical offices in 5 or 10 years. A large consensus emerged on the fact that university should put in place statistical curricula but also that this would not be sufficient for producers of official statistics, at least in the short and medium term, to get highly-qualified and fit-for-purpose manpower. Participants mentioned that technical abilities should be complemented with technological, analytical, communication and managerial skills. Thus, the biggest challenge would be to convince present staff members to embrace modernisation and integration whereas they have been evolving during years in a more stove piped business architecture. In order to secure this cultural shift, it would be essential for the top management to communicate with staff members the advantages of the transformation and identify champions that could relay the message to peers.

The main conclusions and recommendations for this thematic area were the following:

- Conducting at regular intervals reviews of national statistical systems assessing the institutional, organisational and technical readiness to move to the next level of maturity in regards to modernisation and providing recommendations to be incorporated into the NSDS and articulated into road maps;
- Aligning capacity building and training programmes with revamped NSDS and related roadmaps (action plans) for the modernisation and integration of official statistics;
- Reinforcing and supporting the role of the national statistical office as focal point and national coordinator of capacity building activities and technical cooperation projects in the field of statistics;

- Developing at global and continental level an e-learning programme and a repository of training material for official statistics;
- Complementing existing training programmes and university curricula at national, regional and continental level with specific courses related to modernisation and integration of official statistics such as change management, e-data collection, geo-referenced statistics, integrated production, data analysis and visualisation, communication and quality management;
- Introducing the possibility, when relevant and appropriate, to open specific national training courses, including e-learning, to statisticians from other countries;
- Exploring possible governance structure and operational mechanisms for pooling human resources and technical infrastructure such as tablet for geo-referenced census operations within and across national statistical systems.

Interventions and resolutions in the 11th ASSD and the 2nd Joint Session of the CoDG/StatCom-Africa

The concluding session of the African Conference on a Transformative Agenda was adjourned and held just after the opening ceremony of the 11th Africa Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD) on Monday 23rd November. A short presentation on the outcome of the Conference was also delivered at the 2nd Joint Session of the CoDG/StatCom-Africa. This allowed participants to discuss in a broader context recommendations addressed by the African Conference and to articulate them with major agendas and initiatives undertaken by Pan-African organisations.

The 11th Symposium of the ASSD culminated with the adoption of a resolution for statistical development that embraces the aim and objectives of the Transformative Agenda. The resolution, adopted on behalf of the representatives of National Statistical Offices, the Civil Registration Authorities, the African Development Bank, the African Union Commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Population Fund, the government of South Africa as well as other development partners gathered in Libreville for the three events, foresees two articles that explicitly mention the Transformative Agenda and read:

- *We shall formulate a programme for transformative agenda for official statistics in Africa, with the objective of strengthening national statistical systems based on common statistical business architecture.*
- *We agree to treat the National Strategies for the Development of Statistics, which many African countries are designing and implementing, as the framework for delivering the transformative agenda and SHaSA at country level nested in the National Development Plans; and request Pan-African institutions with development partners to take this forward starting in 2016 and report back to the next ASSD, StatCom- Africa/CoDG and the UN Statistical Commission through United Nations Statistics Division.*

It was also agreed to incorporate elements of the Transformative Agenda into the next generic guidelines for National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) to be prepared by Paris21 and the NSDS sector guidelines by the African Development Bank (AfDB).

Annex

Agenda

Saturday 21st November

Registration (08:30 – 09:15)

Welcome and opening (09:15 – 10:30)

- *Mr. Francis Thierry Tiwinot, Statistics Gabon* (10')
- *Mr. Charles Leyeka Lufumpa, African Development Bank* (10')
- *Mr. Ivo Havinga, UNSD* (15')
including outline of the Transformative Agenda and working methods of the Conference
- *Mr. Pieter Everaers, Eurostat* (15')
including report on the outcome of the Global Conference
- *Ms. Valérie Bizier, Statistics Canada* (15'),
including outline of the ISFP

Tea/coffee break with media briefing (10:30 – 11:00)

Possibility for invited media to interview and discuss with some of the key speakers

Session 1: Coordination at and between the global, (sub-) regional and national statistical systems, communication, and advocacy 11:00-15:00

Facilitator: *Mr. Aboubacar Beye, National Agency for Statistics and Demographics of Senegal*

Presentation: *Mr. Pali Lehohla, Statistics South Africa* (30')

Questions and answers (15')

Breakout meetings (45')

Lunch break (12:30-14:00)

Plenary presentations of the outcome of breakout meetings and discussions (60')

Session 2: Innovation and modernisation through standard-based statistical business architecture 15:00-18:15

Facilitator: *Mr. John Kalumbi, Central Statistical Office of Zambia*

Introduction: *Mr. Stéphane Dufour, Statistics Canada* (15')

Presentation: *Mr. António dos Reis Duarte, National Statistical Institute of Cabo Verde* (30')

Questions and answers (15')

Tea/coffee break (16:00-16:30)

Breakout meetings (45')

Plenary presentations of the outcome of breakout meetings and discussions (60')

Sunday 22nd November

Session 3: Securing foundation to modernization and integrated statistical systems

09:00-12:30 *Session related to the ISFP organised by Statistics Canada*

Facilitator: *Mr. Eric Rancourt, Statistics Canada*

Presentations (1h45):

- *Mr. Cosme Vodounou, AFRISTAT*
National Statistical System transformation process and integrated strategic planning and its implementation tools
- *Mr. Neil Jackson, United Kingdom Department for International Development (DfID)*
Coordination of National Statistical Systems: the UK experience
- *Ms. Margaret Nyakango, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics*
Improving human resources management practices
- *Mr. Aboubacar Beye, National Agency for Statistics and Demographics of Senegal*
Rehabilitation of internal communications: source of positive changes
- *Ms. Valérie Bizier, Statistics Canada*
Improving quality management practices
- *Mr. Ben Paul Mungyereza, Uganda Bureau of Statistics*
Setting up a professional services unit, case of Uganda Bureau of Statistics

Questions and answers (15')

Tea/coffee break (30')

Plenary discussions (60')

Lunch break (12:30-14:00)

Session 4: Capacity building and training

14:00-16:30

Facilitator: *Mr. She Etoundi J.G.B., National Statistical Institute of Cameroun*

Presentation: *Mr. Ibrahima Ba, National Statistical Institute of Ivory Coast (30')*

Questions and answers (15')

Breakout meetings (45')

Plenary presentations of the outcome of breakout meetings and discussions (60')

Tea/coffee break (16:30-17:00)

Conclusions and closing (17:00 – 18:30)

Conclusions

(The concluding session was postponed and held just after the opening ceremony of the 11th Africa Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD) on Monday, 23 November.)

Presentation of the outcome of the conference and plenary discussions with the contribution of panellists (60’):

Facilitator: *Mr. Ben Kiregyera, Statistical Consultant*

Panellists:

- *Mr. Pali Lehohla, Statistics South Africa*
- *Mr. António dos Reis Duarte, National Statistical Institute of Cabo Verde*
- *Mr. Ben Paul Mungyereza, Uganda Bureau of Statistics*
- *Mr. Ibrahima Ba, National Statistical Institute of Ivory Coast*

Closing

Closing interventions by representatives from Pan-African organisations and farewell (30’):

- *Mr. Charles Leyeka Lufumpa, African Development Bank*
- *Mr. Joseph Tinfissi Ilboudo, African Centre for Statistics (UN-ECA)*
- *Dr. Rene Kouassi, African Union*
- *Mr. Pali Lehohla, Africa Symposia on Statistical Development*
- *Mr. Francis Thierry Tiwinot, Statistics Gabon*