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**Items for discussion and decision: Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

**Main points from the High Level Forum on Official Statistics –  
Communicating data and statistics: Bringing trusted and actionable data to the  
public, the media and policy-makers  
Monday, 05 March, 2017**

Prepared by United Nations Statistics Division / Department of Economic and  
Social Affairs

## **Main points from the High Level Forum on Official Statistics - Communicating data and statistics: Bringing trusted and actionable data to the public, the media and policy-makers, Monday, 05 March, 2017**

### Notes by the moderators of the sessions.

1. The High-Level Forum on Official Statistics, organized by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) in conjunction with the 49th session of the UN Statistical Commission, was dedicated to discussing how Statistical Agencies can communicate more effectively to help policy makers, the media and the general public identify, understand, and make full use of trusted sources of data and statistics. In particular, the second session focused specifically on how statisticians can better engage with policy makers to support the planning, implementation and monitoring of development efforts at all levels of decision making. The Forum took place on Monday, 5 March 2018, and was attended by almost 300 participants from national statistics offices, regional and international organizations, and representatives of civil society, academia and the private sector.

2. The Forum was organized in two sessions. The first session, “Communicating data to the public”, focused on how to effectively communicate data and statistics, and brought together views from communications specialists, journalists, and statisticians. The second session, “Bringing the work of the Statistical Community to the Global Political Processes”, focused on specific aspects of coordination between the UN Statistical Commission and the High-level Political Forum. The panelists discussed how to bring messages from the Statistical Commission to the attention of policy makers and to inform discussions taking place within the global political processes, including at the High-Level Political Forum.

### Summary of the Forum

3. The first session highlighted ways to effectively communicate data to the public and the importance of data stories in communicating and using data. Effective communication of data is essential to media portrayals of statistics and data. This session also included examples of how statistical offices use data to communicate with the public, and how bringing data literacy into journalism trainings help to ensure statistics are not only incorporated into the narrative, but are done in the appropriate manner.

- The first session of the Forum was dedicated by Mr. Joakim Stymne, Director General, Statistics Sweden, to the memory of Professor Hans Rosling. Mr. Stymne noted that Professor Rosling would have appreciated the attention being given on how to better communicate data to the public and would have enjoyed being part of the Forum.

- Good communication of data and statistics is at the core of the work of the statistical community. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics recognize that "official statistics provide an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society", and stress the need for "official statistics that meet the test of practical utility" and that are "compiled and made available on an impartial basis... to honour citizens' entitlement to public information." Moreover, the Fundamental Principles highlight the need to retain trust in official statistics and facilitate the correct interpretation and proper use of the data and statistics.
- Several of the presenters highlighted good practices in communicating data and on the use of data by journalists. Some of the specific topics discussed were how journalists are being trained to be more statistical and how journalism is incorporating more complex and creative uses of data.
- Data impact stories are used to navigate across data and tell stories. Data stories, in particular allow for an accessible overview to a statistical release that is easily readable and accessible to the general public and is designed to be picked up by the media for further use.
- Communicating data and statistics needs to be made personable. There is work ongoing in South Africa about using data to tell the story of how the data affects a representative person throughout that person's life. This allows people to easily relate to the data and statistics and to understand what these data and statistics actually mean for them.
- Trust is imperative in the context of communicating data and statistics. Statisticians need to work on making the data more trust-worthy to improve their use.

4. The second session took the ongoing discussions around the world about the statistical measurement of the implementation and achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a jumping off point. When politicians agreed upon the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Goals and 169 targets in 2015, they made a commitment to sustainable development for all. Discussions at the political level should be underscored by reliable, disaggregated, timely and relevant statistics produced by national statistical systems to assess the achievement of the Goals and targets.

- In 2017, the General Assembly adopted the Resolution (A/RES/71/313) on the work of the Statistical Commission, which included the Global indicator framework, emphasized the need for capacity building for statistics, and also stressed the need for the UNSC to inform the discussions at the HLPF on statistical gaps and capacity building needs in relation to the implementation of the SDGs. This resolution underscores the importance of ensuring that political discussions are grounded in data and statistics and that the strategic development of statistics are reflected in this discourse. This session focused how ways to have

a more systematic approach for statisticians to communicate to and inform policy makers at this high-level, intergovernmental level.

- The Vice-President of the ECOSOC Bureau emphasized that statisticians should participate fully in the political discussion at the global level and intergovernmental process to ensure that strong statistical systems and proper use of data are integrated as a top priority for development and for the full realization of the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda.
- It was emphasized that the 2030 Agenda presents a huge burden on the global statistical community and that there is a pressing need to strengthen national statistical systems to support the data needs of the Agenda. As the data ecosystem evolves, statisticians need to become information managers and not just producers of statistics.
- Statisticians can and should be engaged throughout all reviews at the HLPF, and the data statisticians report to the HLPF should be used to shape evidence based policy recommendations. While engaging in these global political processes, it is also essential that the independence in the production of data emanating from national statistical offices is maintained. In order to strengthen the role of statistics in the global political processes, it was suggested that national statistical offices have government relations sections.
- Statisticians should also deepen their collaboration across the ECOSOC system and with other functional commissions to improve the range of evidence that can contribute to tracking progress on the SDGs and to offer more coherent policy messages and data at the political level.
- NSOs should engage line ministries and non-governmental stakeholders at the national level in the collection, standardization and harmonization of data for policy formulation. Data produced must be policy-relevant and not exist for its own sake.
- NSOs should put a greater effort into data analysis and its application to policy making. In many countries, strong data generating capacity exists but the capacity to do data analysis is weak; this leads to an inability for these data to be used to inform policy.
- The Statistical Commission should carve out a role for itself in shaping global policies for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs by fully contributing to the deliberations at the HLPF, ECOSOC and General Assembly. Statisticians and policy makers are in a partnership for the public good.