Mercy Kanyuka, Commissioner of Statistics, Malawi

“...High quality data is the lynchpin and hallmark of every policy decision...”

A. Specific challenges encountered as a result of Covid-19

- **Funding:** Statistics continues to suffer from low funding both from Government budget and Donors
  - This has worsened with Covid-19 where resources are reprogrammed towards the pandemic despite the need to establish an effective data reporting mechanism on the prevalence as well as impact of Covid-19

- **Statistics Operations:** Disruption of Survey programs leading to delays in provision of data
  - For Household Surveys data collection Covid-19 has posed a new challenge of additional funding for protecting the data collector and respondent by providing them with PPEs
  - Virtual/electronic interfaces with respondents have not been as effective as physical ones, impacting on quality of data, specifically economic statistics.
  - Delivery of virtual technical assistance has been a challenge. The impact has not been the same
  - Working from home has negatively impacted deliverables; generally, more home hours than office hours.

- **Administrative data:** The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the lack and emphasized the need for reliable administrative data.
  - Special surveys are implemented to monitor economic and social impact of Covid-19 when reliable and robust administrative data on health and labour, mobile finance use etc would have provided real-time information
  - The pandemic has also shown the need for data at lower geographical levels, districts and even lower. States should be able to track 'hot spots' for a pandemic and other phenomena.

- **Collaboration/Coordination:** This has been mostly ineffective among data producing entities of Covid-19.
  - Demand for COVID-19 data attracted a number of data producing players who need to be coordinated (and managed to avoid misleading the public).
B. Responding to the challenges

- **Reduced funding**: The NSO has had to prioritise core activities such as
  Price data collection for Price Indices and Inflation Rate
  - Use of online survey data collection
  - Prioritised online data dissemination: media, emails, and website

- **Ineffective virtual/electronic interfaces with respondents**:  
  - Intervention undertaken was to accelerate follow-up through telephone calls to improve data quality.

- **Ineffective collaboration/coordination on Covid-19 matters**:  
  - To meet the increased demand for data on COVID19 prevalence and Social and Economic Impact  
    - NSO/ World Bank jointly introduced a High-Frequency Phone survey on Covid-19 in July, 2020 to monitor the economic impacts of the pandemic and other shocks

- **Capacity for real-time Covid-19 prevalence statistics**:  
  - Integration of NSO in the national committee of Covid-19 data generation.  
  - NSO officers within Ministry of Health provide support

C. Recommendations/suggestions to enable NSOs to meet the evolving needs for support and resources

  - **Ring-fence funding** (from both Government and Development Partners) for statistical development to ensure sustainable development.
  - **Modernisation and Strengthening** of NSS in terms of physical and statistical infrastructure.
  - **Coordinated** financial and technical support to the National Statistical System by Development Partners to build Capacity to produce **quality administrative data** for timely policy and program interventions
  - **Capacity transfer** in utilization of **big data** to inform timely policy and program direction
  - **Enhance capacity** transfer through technical and financial assistance in the design of online surveys, including phone surveys
  - **Capacity building** in the effective use of statistics in **policy making** institutions
  - **Capacity building** of the **media** in interpretation of statistics for effective publicity