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Report of the Africa Working Group
on
Development Indicators

I. Background

1.   The need for accurate and timely statistics for monitoring progress towards Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed development initiatives has pressed the African countries to produce them at much more frequent intervals now than ever before. These recent efforts has also given African countries the opportunity to strengthen the capacity of their statistical system to deliver reliable and timely information for evidence-based policy and programme formulation and for monitoring progress towards development goals including the MDGs. There have been a number of efforts at the international, regional and national levels towards strengthening national statistical capacities in order to improve collection, compilation and dissemination of reliable and timely data on these indicators. Despite these efforts and progress made in this direction, African countries are facing many statistical challenges in timely and reliable production and reporting of data on MDG indicators. These challenges include continuing data gaps, data discrepancies between international and national data and between data obtained from different sources within the country, mainly due to variable concepts, definitions and methodologies; data dissemination and reporting; and data quality.

2.   These issues have been engaging the attention of the international community for sometime. In this regard, the Inter-Agency Expert Group meeting on MDG Indicators (IAEG) in its meeting held in Paris in November 2007 suggested that the UN regional commissions review the issue of discrepancies between national and international estimates in close collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) (ESA/STAT/AC.138/20). These recommendations were in line with the ones of the Report of the Friends of the Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission on the MDG indicators (E/CN.3/2006/15) and of the Report to the Secretary General on Indicators for monitoring the MDGs (E/CN.3/2007/13) that suggested that all UN regional commissions engage in a joint effort to address issues related to the statistical capacity of countries to monitor the MDGs.

3.   The above recommendations were endorsed by the first meeting of STATCOM-Africa that urged development partners to provide sustainable technical and financial assistance to improve national capacities for the collection, processing, analysis and use of data for MDG monitoring under the framework of National Statistical Systems. To address these statistical challenges facing Africa, StatCom-Africa, in its first meeting in 2008, had set up seven Working Groups (WGs) on key statistical subject-matters in Africa, including one on Working Group on Development Indicators (AGDI). The mandate of the AGDI was to support and advise StatCom-Africa in its quest to address challenges facing African countries on the monitoring of development indicators, particularly MDG monitoring. The working group is composed of representatives from fifteen countries, ADB and ECA (secretariat).

4.   The theme of the StatCom Africa II was 'Harnessing Financial and Technical Resources in Support of the Monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals in African Countries'. During the second meeting of StatCom-Africa in 2010, the Working Group elected a bureau composed of Chair: Zimbabwe (Chair), Benin (Vice-Chair), Angola and Gambia (Reporters). At that meeting the working group also agreed on a number of recommendations that aim to improve the development and monitoring of development indicators, including MDGs. These recommendations are as follow:

a) To conduct a study on why African countries might not meet some MDG targets and to prepare the inclusion of development goals/indicators specific to Africa beyond 2015;

b) To have ECA and its partners develop a Handbook on the derivation of development indicators from population censuses and household surveys;

c) To get countries to build national databases which should include MDG indicators;

d) To have ECA and its partners provide resources to the Group to enable it carry out its mandate (e.g. workshops, meetings, consultancies etc.);

e) To promote the setting up of national MDG focal points and Coordination Committees; and

f) To promote better involvement of national political authorities (Government, Parliament, Civil Society and the Private Sector) in MDG monitoring.

5.   The objective of this report is to inform StatCom III about the overall progress made in the African continent with regard to collection, processing and timely reporting of quality data on development indicators including those in the MDGs. The report also specifically aims at updating the StatCom on implementation status of recommendations made at the second meeting of StatCom-Africa and the progress made by member states, regional and international organizations and other key stakeholders in addressing challenges in timely and reliable production and reporting of data on MDG indicators.

II   Overview of the progress made in data collection in countries

6.   There is no doubt that the efforts of the international agencies, regional organizations and more importantly, the own efforts of members states have resulted in improved availability of data, especially those on MDG indicators. To illustrate the point, produced below are two tables on the availability of MDG data for at least two data points by different ranges of number of indicators. The first table (Table 1) is compiled based on the internationally obtained data in the UNECA database as on end of December 2010 and the Table 2 is compiled from the time series data on MDG indicators collected from member states in early 2011. While Table 1 includes all the 53 African countries, Table 2 could be compiled only on the basis of 39 countries for which data was available.

Table 1: Availability of MDG data for at least two data points by ranges of number of indicators (based on internationally obtained data in the UNECA database)

Number of Indicators with at least two data points	As of December 2000		As of December 2005		As of December 2010	
	Number of Countries	Percentage of Countries	Number of Countries	Percentage of Countries	Number of Countries	Percentage of Countries
0-9	1	2	0	0	0	0
10-19	11	21	4	8	4	8
20-29	39	74	32	60	25	47
30-40	2	4	17	32	24	45
Total	53	100	53	100	53	100

7.   It can be seen from the above table that while as in 2000 only 2 countries (4 per cent) had at least two data points for the 30 or more indicators, in ten years time as many as 24 countries (45 per cent) fall in that category

Table 2: Availability of MDG data for at least two data points by ranges of number of indicators (based on data obtained from country)

Number of Indicators with at least two data points	As of 2000		As of 2005		As of 2010	
	Number of Countries	Percentage of Countries	Number of Countries	Percentage of Countries	Number of Countries	Percentage of Countries
0-8	9	23	2	5	1	3
9-17	26	67	25	64	18	46
18-26	4	10	10	26	16	41
27-34	0	0	2	5	4	10
Total	39	100	39	100	39	100

8.   The Table 2 shows that as of December 2000, only 4 countries produced data for at least two data points for 18 or more indicators and this number increased to 12 as of 2005 to 20 between 2006 and 2010.

9.   The improvement in data collection activity is largely the result of more and more countries embarking on household surveys (such as Demographic Health Surveys (DHS), Multi-indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS)) and Population and Housing Census (PHC)[1]. Given below is an account of number of surveys (DHS and MICS only) and PHCs undertaken in past years by number of countries,

Table 3: Number of countries which conducted DHS in different time-periods

Number of DHS Surveys	Number of Countries			
	1985-1994	1995-2004	2005-2014	1990 - 2010
1	20	12	23	11
2	7	15	10	9
3	0	4	0	7
4	0	0	0	7
5	0	1	0	6
6	0	0	0	2
7	0	0	0	1
8	0	0	0	0
9	0	0	0	1
Not Conducted	26	21	20	9

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[1] MDG data are derived form various other household surveys such as Welfare Surveys, Employment and Labour Force Surveys and also form administrative data

Conducted	27	32	33	44
	53	53	53	53

Table 4: Number of countries that conducted MICS in different periods

Number of MICS Surveys	Number of Countries			
	1985-1994	1995-2004	2005-2014	1990 - 2010/
1	1	30	26	14
2	0	6	0	20
3	0	0	0	5
Not Conducted	52	17	27	14
Conducted	1	36	26	39
	53	53	53	53

Table 5: Number of countries that conducted PHCs in different rounds

Round of Censuses	Number of Countries		
	Census not Conducted/Planned	Conducted Census	Remaining Planned Censuses until 2014
1990 round /1985-1994/	10	43	
2000 round /1995-2004/	15	38	
2010 round /2005-2014/	1	29	24

III   Important activities implemented

Implementation of recommendations of StatCom II:

10.   Given below is the progress of implementation of each of the recommendations made in the StatCom II,

a) To conduct a study on why African countries might not meet some MDG targets and to prepare the inclusion of development goals/indicators specific to Africa beyond 2015

11.   A Study on Sources and Methodologies for Newly Identified Development Indicators Customized to the Realities, Needs and Priorities for Human and Social Development beyond 2015 has been developed and is under finalization. This study has since been reviewed and commented upon by an Expert Group in a meeting held in November 2011.

b) To have ECA and its partners develop a Handbook on the derivation of development indicators from population censuses and household surveys

12.   The ECA has now published a Handbook on Data Sources and Estimation of Development Indicators in African Countries. This Handbook has been prepared with the objective of assisting African countries in identifying data sources and deriving development indicators from population and housing censuses and household surveys in line with the African perspectives and realities. This Handbook is expected to provide guidelines on how to use data from population and housing censuses and surveys for producing indicators and to build complete and regularly updated data bases in each country and report to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) for the purpose of building a regional database.

13.   The Handbook presents the historical origin of Millennium Development Goals (MDG), data sources (including Census and survey) for computation of MDG indicators, issues on data production and quality, analysis of indicators for measuring and monitoring MDG goals (definition, rationale, data sources, estimation or computation of indicator and gender issues). The MDG indicators have been adapted from the UNSD Website or contents of the United Nations publication "Indicators for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals, ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/95" with minor additions. The Handbook also describes the institutional framework for MDG indicators and various challenges connected with the measurement of MDG indicators. The Handbook also describes issues and challenges in the African context for each Goal and also other topics discussed in the handbook

14.   The handbook was earlier reviewed by experts on two occasions on two occasions. The first expert group meeting (EGM) was held in Kigali, Rwanda, from June 28 to July 1, 2010 in which the first draft of the handbook was presented. Based on the rich inputs provided by the experts in Kigali, the handbook was improved and presented for final validation in one of the sessions in the Regional Workshop on MDG held in Kampala, Uganda from 7 to 11 March, 2011.

c) To get countries to build national databases including MDG indicators

15.   The regional workshop was held in Nairobi, Kenya from 15 to 19 February 2010 on Development and Management of MDG Database at the country level. The overall objective of the workshop was to ensure that MDG reporting is improved and up-to-date for the period 2010-2015, and MDGs databases are available at country and international level to monitor progress of African countries in the achievement of the MDGs. One of the key recommendations of the workshop was to establish MDG Statistics Committees in each country. The workshop also made a number of recommendations on database development and management and these were:

  a) Expedite the creation and/or improvement of a MDG database that is readily accessible to all stakeholders;
  b) Decide on the format and content of the database to enhance accessibility;
  c) Establish a regular updating schedule and the responsibility for updating;
  d) Establish a dissemination schedule and the method to be used to deliver data to stakeholders;
  e) Provide support to ensure proper maintenance, protection and continued improvement and growth of the database, including the provision of a secure and regular back-up; and
  f) Promote and support the use of DevInfo as a tool for MDG data management and data exchange.

16.   Although, there has not been any assessment as to how countries have developed their MDG database and maintaining them, a quick analysis of the websites of National Statistics office does suggest that the countries have not necessarily organized their database with an exclusive section for MDG indicators. A large number of countries have adaptations of DevInfo but they are not necessarily web versions. A number of countries have not been able to update their earlier versions.

17.   The workshop in Kampala, Uganda in March 2011 encouraged countries to create computerized database (preferably web-based) on MDG indicators and make them accessible to all stakeholders. The database technology used should be standard and on open platform. In this regard, countries should have a strategy to internalize the technology by training appropriate staff such as Statisticians, IT experts, GIS experts and other statistical producers for continuous update and maintenance.

18.   There is a need to work with the countries for the development and maintenance of MDG database on any platform of their choice. An Expert Group meeting on Preparation of Handbook on major Data Management and Dissemination Platforms was held during 3-5 August in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in which a comparative analysis of features of several platforms for data management and dissemination was done. The handbook on the management and dissemination platforms will provide a bouquet of options on this for the countries to make a choice from.

d) To have ECA and its partners provide resources to the Group to enable it carry out its mandate (e.g. workshops, meetings, consultancies etc.)

19.   The AGDI could physically meet only once in the last two years as there were no funds available for organizing separate meetings to systematically undertake and coordinate the work of the group. Three regional workshops on MDGs were organized since last StatCom meeting. The AGDI an entity has an important role to play in shaping the agenda of these workshops and also tin following up of the outcome of these workshops and meetings. There is a need to look for a mechanism to ensure that AGDI can meet at much more frequent intervals if it has to play a leadership role in guiding the agenda of improving the collection, compilation, and reporting of timely and reliable data on development indicators in Africa.

e) To promote the setting up of national MDG focal points and Coordination Committees

20.   The workshop on MDG held in February 2010 in Kenya, made the following recommendation with regard to the setting up of national MDG Committees and nominating a national MDG focal point

- *Countries shall urgently establish MDG Statistical Committees (MDGC), where they do not exist, comprising NSO itself, relevant units of MDGs, UN agencies and other development partners, and prepare detailed rules of committee procedure;*
- *MDGC shall be led by the Head of the NSO;*
- *MDGC shall mobilize funds for its activities, including those for capacity building; and*

- *MDGC shall designate focal persons in NSO and other data-producing government organizations to facilitate regular data transfer to the NSO MDG database.*

21.   Almost all countries have identified MDG focal points and many of them have established MDG committees. It would be necessary to ensure that these MDG Committees are functional and are able to contribute to the improved and timely availability of quality data on development indicators.

f) To promote better involvement of national political authorities (Government, Parliament, Civil Society and the Private Sector) in MDG monitoring

22.   In many countries the MDG monitoring is undertaken at the highest levels of the government. There is very little evidence of systematic engagement of civil society and private sector in this regard.

Other activities implemented by regional partners

23.   This report briefly tries to capture some of the other initiatives undertaken by the African Centre for Statistics in last two years

24.   There are two major projects that are currently being implemented by ACS namely:

a) The UN Development Account (DA) Project on MDGs: Inter-institutional capacities for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals through Interregional cooperation.

b) Strengthening Statistical Capacities of African Countries to meet challenges in the collection, compilation, dissemination, and use of data to address inclusive social and economic development agendas: Looking beyond 2015 (DFID funded project)

25.   The DA project on MDGs, which essentially is an inter-regional programme, aims to increase the availability of up-to-date and comparable MDG data at the national, regional and global level, through the improvement of the capacities of countries to monitor their progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The following two handbooks have been developed under the project:

a) A Handbook on strategies on how to decrease statistical discrepancies in MDG indicators between national, regional and international sources; and

b) A Handbook on best practices adopted by countries in the African region with regard to statistical production, monitoring, reporting, dissemination and use of data on MDG indicators including at the sub-national level.

26.   The handbook on data discrepancies will inform the strategies to be adopted in reducing discrepancies data from various sources. The best practices study in countries is based on seven criteria namely, a) Strong political commitment b) Effective coordination mechanism of the national statistical system c) Alignment of the national data collection undertakings to meet the requirement international standards and concepts d) Production of disaggregated data on MDG indicators e) Clarity of indicators and metadata f) Effective and efficient storage and dissemination of MDG data and g) Establishment of a complete Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System.

27.   Under the DfID project, the UNECA has developed a Handbook on collection, compilation, analysis and use of disaggregated data including those from administrative sources (especially in health and education) in support of advocacy for inclusive policies and programmes and decentralized policy formulation, programme implementation and monitoring. The type of disaggregation discussed in the handbook includes geography, gender, social and ethnic groups and household poverty/wealth percentiles.

28.   All the above mentioned handbooks under the DA project and the DfID project have been reviewed and validated in an Expert Group Meeting held in Yaoundé, Cameroon from 21-24 November 2011.

29.   The other study undertaken under the project on Sources and Methodologies for Newly Identified Development Indicators Customized to the Realities, Needs and Priorities for Human and Social Development in Africa beyond 2015 has been developed. As stated earlier this study was reviewed and commented upon by the same expert group.

30.   The Afican Centre for Statistics is also re-designing its database (Statbase) to include the following enhancement

   a) Improved feature for including appropriate metadata in a standard form;

   b) Comparison of national and international data source with appropriate metadata;

   c) Include disaggregated data on MDG indicators from national sources; and

   d) Improve the electronic and printed outputs for the above.

31.   It would be important to mention that the above mentioned projects/activities have been jointly implemented by the UNECA, AfDB and AUC.

32.   The UNCEA has also published the first volume of African Statistics   Pocketbook 2011which presents statistical trends for each African countries covering three major area namely Demographic Statistics, Social and Environment Statistics and Economic Statistics. The Pocketbook will be an annual publication to be produced by the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) of UNECA.

Important Joint Initiatives

33.   One of the most important aspects of any statistical endeavor in Africa at the continental level has been the collaborative and harmonized approach adopted by various regional statistical institutions which also includes the initiatives in the area of improvement of data on development indicators. This is achieved through various institutional arrangements. Given below are three major initiatives.

1. Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System (CRVS)

34.   In the majority of African countries, past initiatives and efforts aimed at improving civil registration and vital statistics systems were largely dominated by isolated project-based and institutionally bound *ad-hoc* exercises with no link to national development frameworks or policy issues. The regional initiatives in this area have also been sporadic and uncoordinated.

35.   The UNECA, AUC and AfDB in partnership with other regional institutions and UN agencies have embarked upon a major initiative for the improvement of CRVS in the region adopting a holistic approach by seeking to address systemic issues related to legal, policy, management and operational aspects of the CRVS. This is a paradigm shift from the earlier project based approach adopted by the countries and the region. One of the major achievements in this process was the commitment made by the Ministers responsible for the Civil Registration in the First Conference held in August 2010 to support a time-bound implementation of the reforms process for improvement of CRVS in their respective countries. The Declaration made by the Ministers in the meeting and the Medium Term Action Plan developed by Expert Group earlier, which was endorsed by the Ministers, now form the basis for future action in accelerated improvement of CRVS in the region.

2. AfricaInfo

36.   The Joint Meeting of the AU Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and UNECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development endorsed the development of the AfricaInfo database, which largely will have data on devlopment including those of MDGs. The fourth joint meeting, held in Addis Ababa from 24 to 29 March 2011, endorsed the initiative and passed Resolution 882 (XLIV) calling upon *the African Union Commission, the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund to strengthen their collaboration for the operationalization of the AfricaInfo initiative to ensure that it has a continental dimension, and produce a plan for its implementation.* The four named institutions already have initiated the work of AfricaInfo.

3. African Statistics Year Book

37.   The African Statistics Year Book (ASYB) is a jointly published by the UNECA, AfDB and AUC since 2008. This has been well received by the countries and the other data users as it presents a unified set of data for all development indicators and totally eliminated the problem of conflicting data coming from the three regional offices. Efforts are on to improve the quality and content of ASYB.

IV   Key challenges on data

38.   The key challenges on data on development indicators can be categorized into three major areas.

   a) Data gaps and discrepancies
   b) Data quality and timeliness
   c) Data dissemination, analysis and use

39.   The above mentioned challenges, which are commonly encountered in all the countries with different degree, have been discussed and debated in a number of workshops and meetings in the past including those in Nairobi (February 2010), Kigali (June-July 2010) and Kampala (March 2011). They still continue to act as impediment in obtaining quality and timely data on development indicators. A number of recommendations have emanated from these workshops and the two most common recommendations made by the countries to address these issues on a sustained basis relate to building of national capacities and improving national coordination. A number of steps have been taken in the past on capacity building in addressing the issues relating to data collection and reducing data gaps and data discrepancies, improvement in data quality, its timely dissemination and use. The focus now should be on building capacities of countries in writing of metadata, data management and dissemination, and production, analysis and use of disaggregated data.

V   Plan of Action

40.   The Commission is invited to consider the following for discussion and action:

   1. *Inclusion of other UN agencies, Regional Economic Communities and Statistical Training Centres in AGDI:* There are various other international agencies that are actively engaged in data collection, processing, dissemination and use of data on development indicators, especially in the countries. Some of these agencies also have regional programmes on data improvement. The AGDI, therefore proposes inclusion of UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO, WHO, UNDP, UNAIDS and any other agency interested in contributing to the development of statistics on development indicators... The AGDI also proposes the inclusion of all Regional Economic Communities, and four Statistical Training Centres (by rotation) as members;

   2. *Training of statistical personnel in the country offices on various handbooks and manuals developed at the regional level:* In past two years a number of manuals and handbooks have

been developed on improvement of data collection, reduction in discrepancies, dissemination and analysis of data on development indicators. The next two years will be focused on training statistical personnel on these aspects. The trainings will be cascading in nature to maximize the reach. The AGDI proposes that the Statistical Training Centres (STCs) in the universities and the in-service training suitably integrate the contents of these handbooks in their existing curricula or develop separate courses (or build separate modules in the existing courses);

3. *Improvement of metadata standards and writing of metadata:* Development of metadata standards on development indicators and improving the capacity of the countries to write proper metadata will be a major area of work in the next two years. It is proposed to conduct two workshops on the subject at the regional in collaboration with international agencies and experts.

4. *Improvement of data reporting mechanism from the countries:* Request countries to provide data and metadata on development indicators including those of MDGs in a systematic and uniform manner to the regional organization through a much more coordinated and uniform platform. Countries that have not yet constituted the MDG Statistics Committees at the national level may be encouraged to do so. AGDI proposes to explore the use of SDMX for data and metadata transfer in the continent. This will not only ensure error free and uniform transfer of data but also reduce the time lag in data processing and dissemination at the regional level.

5. *Institutional issues related to the functioning of AGDI* : The only meeting that the AGDI had since the StatCom II meeting was in September 2011 and it was unanimously agreed that the group needs find a better and more effective way of functioning. Some of the proposed for better functioning of AGDI were
    a) The group should meet at least twice a year. UNECA and AfDB should allocate sufficient fund for this purpose. If possible, the AGDI members should be called for Expert Group Meetings so that they can, if required, have a separate side meeting.;
    b) A network on the UNECA website should be created for exchanging of information and knowledge. This network should have the facility of translation; and
    c) There is need to develop a monitoring framework with clearly identified performance indicators so that the StatCom can be systematically reported on progress.