



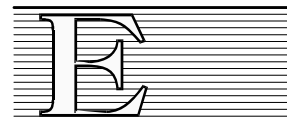
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**Statistics and Statistical Capacity in Africa:
Key Issues and Emerging Challenges**

A. Introduction

1. The past fifteen years have been characterized by the emergence of several national, regional, and international initiatives to tackle major development issues facing the African continent. A diverse range of players across the globe have agreed on a common platform of priorities for addressing the many faces of extreme poverty, ranging from hunger, joblessness, disease and lack of housing, to gender inequality and environmental degradation. In this context, African countries and development partners increasingly recognized the need for better statistics not only as a tool for evidence-based policy design and planning but also to better support policy implementation, monitor progress and evaluate outcomes and impacts of development initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

2. As a result, there has been an unprecedented increase in demand for quality and timely statistics in Africa as policy makers and other stakeholders seek information on national and international developments. This increased demand is accompanied by a new culture championing rigorous monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and evidence-based policy decisions. This has challenged already weak and vulnerable National Statistical Systems (NSSs) and presented new opportunities for raising public awareness about statistics and for harnessing national and international resources for developing statistical capacities.

3. In recognition of the challenges facing Africa, the fundamental role that Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) continues to play in the promotion of subregional, regional and international cooperation for Africa's development, and the importance of reliable statistics and data for planning, monitoring and evaluating progress in the achievement of nationally, regionally, and internationally agreed development agendas, African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development requested the ECA Secretariat, in a resolution during the Ouagadougou meeting in 2006, to assist African countries to strengthen their capacities in the area of data collection and statistical development.

4. This background paper presents some of the issues and challenges facing African countries in enhancing their statistical capacity. It also gives an overview of some of the recent initiatives and progress made so far by African stakeholders. These initiatives include the Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity-Building in Africa (RRSF), the Africa Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD), and the African Programme on the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses (2010 RPHC). Furthermore, the paper elaborates on a way forward and on the role ECA plays in addressing these challenges.

5. The way forward might consider a number of issues aimed at supporting ongoing regional initiatives in the quest for improving statistical development on the continent. These may include:

- Increasing financial support to national statistical activities;
- Establishing a culture of evidence-based policy decision-making in line ministries;

- Ensuring that major regional organizations provide adequate technical leadership in the monitoring, evaluation, and reporting on progress made towards the improvement in the production of quality statistics on the continent;
- Helping countries emerging from conflict in their quest to address their statistical gaps and adequately prepare themselves for the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses; and
- Supporting the ECA statistical programme and reaffirming its coordinating and leadership role in statistical development on the continent.

B. Issues and challenges facing Africa

6. There are many issues and challenges to developing statistical capacity in Africa, including:

- ***Stronger political commitment, especially at the national level, to statistical production.*** National Statistical Offices (NSOs) are often too low in government hierarchies. The challenge is to play an advocacy role so that national governments give high priority to statistical production and use. Data users, especially planners, policy makers and decision makers, need to be more aware of the strategic importance of statistics in their work, particularly in economic management, formulation of policies, measuring and monitoring poverty and tackling other development issues based on evidence.
- ***Strengthened coordination, collaboration, networking and sharing of information*** at national, subregional and regional levels. Those delivering capacity-building activities to NSSs should promote coordination and synergy among institutions involved in statistical activities on the continent to avoid duplication of efforts and overlaps in their interventions.
- ***Enhanced institutional capacities***, including human and financial resources, and infrastructure to produce statistics. Human and institutional capacity must be developed and managed in order to enhance organizational performance, broaden the base of knowledge and strategic skills, and motivate staff.
- ***Upgraded national statistical tools*** to meet the increase in demand for the statistics needed to inform national and international development agendas. NSSs should upgrade national capabilities for planning and conducting household surveys and censuses; and
- ***Compliance with current conceptual frameworks*** such as the 1993 System of National Accounts (1993 SNA), which should be adopted and implemented much more widely and urgently. NSSs should comply with international methodologies, standards, and norms to ensure that the data produced are comparable across the continent and internationally.

C. Statistical capacity-building: major regional initiatives

7. To overcome the above challenges, stakeholders in statistical development in Africa have undertaken several initiatives namely the RRSF, the ASSD, the 2010 RPHC, and the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) programme of work at ECA. These initiatives are built on strategies such as advocacy, coordination of statistical capacity-building activities, training, and enhancing capabilities for undertaking household surveys and censuses. Advocacy is needed to raise awareness of the importance of statistics among statistical producers, users, and other stakeholders. Coordination is needed to overcome the uncoordinated and unsustainable manner in which past efforts have been undertaken, causing lack of progress in statistical development. Training of statisticians is essential to provide NSSs with skilled staff to carry out their programmes. Upgrading national capabilities for planning and conducting household surveys and censuses and providing technical assistance and advice on processing, analysing and disseminating data will certainly help countries to meet the increased demand for statistics that is emerging from national and international development agendas.

1. The Reference Regional Strategic Framework¹

8. To overcome the shortcomings of past efforts aimed at enhancing statistical capacity in Africa, the major sponsors of the Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21), and the World Bank, agreed to launch the production of the RRSF under the leadership of ECA. This framework is expected to create synergies, avoid duplication of effort and lead to sustainable capacity for statistical development in Africa.

9. The RRSF is a broad framework rather than a specific set of activities and policy prescriptions, that recognizes that most of the actions will need to take place at the national level and that countries have different problems and priorities. The RRSF, whose overall objective is to strengthen national statistical systems, is built around three themes: meeting users' needs; improving management of statistical systems; and ensuring the sustainability and irreversibility of statistical development. It was endorsed by the Heads of NSOs in Africa and by FASDEV stakeholders. The primary responsibility for implementing the framework lies with the NSSs, with the key drivers being NSOs, while the RRSF implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting is to be jointly undertaken by AfDB and ECA. While many of the recommended actions can be implemented within the existing national budget figures, to fully reach the objectives of the RRSF, the incremental cost is estimated at US\$ 75 million per year for African countries in general and at about US\$ 60 million for low-income countries. This requires increased commitments from national governments and support from development partners for adequate and sustainable budgetary resources.

¹ AfDB, PARIS21, ECA, The World Bank, "The Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity Building in Africa: Better Statistics for Improved Development Outcomes", ECA Documents Publishing and Distribution Unit, Addis Ababa, October 2006.

2. The Africa Symposia on Statistical Development

10. In line with the recognition of the fundamental role that ECA is playing in Africa's development, reinforcing the capacity of member States and also that of the regional economic communities (RECs) and addressing the other challenges of their member States constitute an important part of the Commission's support to countries in different areas including statistics and statistical development. It is in this regard that ECA supports ASSD.

11. ASSD is a country-led initiative aimed at providing a forum in which African countries could discuss issues pertaining to their statistical development on a regionally coordinated basis. The Symposia are organized in countries on a rotational basis. They consider a number of aspects relating to developing sustainable statistical systems, address the challenges of capacity-building, and provide a platform for a comprehensive exchange of experiences and technical assistance among African countries.

12. The first meeting of a series of 53 took place in Cape Town under the leadership of South Africa in February 2006 on the theme "*The 2006 Africa Symposium on Statistical Development: The 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses.*" It was organized in close consultation with ECA and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). This meeting was opened by His Excellency, Trevor Manuel, Minister of Finance of the Republic of South Africa and by Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA.

13. The second meeting took place in Kigali from 15 to 19 January 2007. The meeting was opened by His Excellency, Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA, Ms. Anna Dias Lourenco, Minister of Planning of the Republic of Angola, and Mr. James Musoni, Minister of Finance of the Republic of Rwanda, under the theme "*Africa Counts: Towards a Complete Enumeration of the African Population during the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses.*" During the meeting, member States discussed the preparedness of countries that would be undertaking a census during the period 2007 to 2009, in order to identify areas of potential collaboration and exchange of expertise. Partners identified some areas of intervention within the framework of ECA's African Regional Programme on Population and Housing Censuses. The participants also revisited their proposed recommendations to the Principles and Recommendations on Population and Housing Censuses (P&R) and provided inputs to the preparation of a regional supplement of the P&R as expressed during the Maputo and Bamako meetings. The African supplement to the P&R is being finalized by ECA. The next symposium will take place in January 2008 in Accra, Ghana.

14. The first ASSD nominated 9 countries (Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia, and Uganda,) to the Bureau of Statistics: Friends of ECA. This Bureau is charged with the responsibility of engaging ECA on the various statistical challenges and needs facing the region that require ECA's involvement and leadership. The Friends of ECA was established to work with the Commission to re-establish a sustainable statistical programme for Africa. In this regard, in addition to a special focus on the Global Programme for the 2010 RPHC they developed a work programme to address the challenges facing the African statistical community under the following four themes: capacity-building; institutional reform; leadership

and management; and advocacy and resource mobilization. Some of the achievements of the Friends of ECA since the Cape Town meeting include:

- A programme of work to address challenges facing the African statistical community;
- A strong advocacy campaign aimed at enhancing the statistical function at ECA that resulted in the creation of ACS as a Division of the ECA;
- Participation of the Friends of ECA in the process of producing the Business Plan for the newly created ACS. As major beneficiaries of ECA's work, it was paramount that African countries, through the Friends of ECA, be part of the process of deciding future activities in statistical capacity-building. They were represented by South Africa in its capacity as Chair of the Friends of ECA;
- Strong advocacy in favour of improving censuses undertaken during the 2010 RPHC by their involvement in the preparation of the Special African Statistics Day that took place in Angola and, which aimed at committing the country to undertake a census in the current round;
- Participation of the Friends of ECA in the discussions that led to the production of a framework for collaboration between ADB and ECA in statistical capacity-building in Africa.

3. The African Programme on the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses

15. The increased participation of African countries in the 2010 RPHC is one of the most important concerns of the African statistical community. To ensure that African countries are well prepared for the 2010 RPHC, it has been agreed that the first ASSD series will focus on censuses. The work programme proposed by the Friends of ECA was designed to focus largely on preparing the African continent for undertaking censuses in the period 2005 – 2014. The achievements under this programme include:

- ***Coordination between regional and world programmes:*** ECA presented the outcomes of the Cape Town meeting including the recommendations on the revision of the P&R to the 2006 Statistical Commission and also forwarded them to the Expert Group as a regional input to the production of the revised P&R. Moreover, two workshops were organized for twenty-four African countries on the 2010 Programme on PHC in Maputo, Mozambique from 30 October to 2 November 2006 and for French-speaking countries in Bamako from 6 to 9 November 2006. The workshops focused on P&R application of African countries undertaking their censuses in the near future.
- ***Census advocacy and networks:*** ECA and the Friends of ECA, in collaboration with UNSD, organized a Special African Statistics Day in Angola on 7 December 2006. This advocacy meeting aimed at getting the commitment of the Angolan Government to undertake a census during the 2010 Round. It brought together many African

Heads of NSOs as well as some high-level African officials, including the Executive Secretary of ECA, the Commissioner of Economic Affairs of the African Union Commission (AUC), and the Minister of Planning and the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Angola. As a result, the Angolan Government committed to undertake a PHC by 2010 while the African community and partners committed themselves to build the capacity of the Angolan NSO, in preparation for the census to be undertaken in 2010. Angola's last census was undertaken in 1970. This is part of an advocacy tour aimed at improving the participation of African countries in the current round of censuses.

- ***Forging partnerships:*** ECA has started building partnerships in order to launch the African Programme on Population and Housing Censuses. The African census programme is an integral part of the aide-mémoire signed by ADB and ECA in terms of collaboration in statistics for the next two years. ECA has also approached the United Nations Population Fund Country Support Teams (UNFPA/CSTs) in order to collaborate on census taking in Africa.

4. ECA's response to the challenges

16. ECA has assisted African countries to build and strengthen their capacity in various areas of statistical development through: providing advisory services, preparing guidelines for assessing statistical needs, developing strategies, training, preparing and adapting handbooks and manuals, and coordinating technical cooperation.

17. During the period 1970-1993, ECA launched regional technical assistance programmes, with the support of bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies. These programmes had great impact on the development of African statistics. The programmes were:

- The African census programme, which offered advisory services and technical assistance to help countries to plan and undertake census operations;
- The African household survey capability programme, aimed at strengthening the capacity to conduct household surveys at country level;
- The national accounts capability programme for States to adopt and implement the SNA; and
- The statistical training programme for Africa to enhance skills and competencies in various areas related to statistics.

18. ECA's technical assistance to African countries declined drastically in 1993, when funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to the Commission's major regional cooperation programmes, ceased.

5. The African Centre for Statistics (ACS)

19. In 2006, ECA undertook a repositioning exercise. One of the main areas considered in the repositioning process was statistics and statistical capacity-building in the African region. A chain of events, resolutions and frameworks aimed at placing statistics at the core of the African development agenda, have culminated in the creation of the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) at the divisional level. The repositioning of the statistics programme is expected to enable ECA to play its rightful role in statistical development by enhancing the statistical capacity of African countries. This capacity is needed for better economic management and tracking of progress towards achievement of gender equality and other internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

20. ACS has developed a programme aimed at revitalizing and better coordinating statistics at the ECA Secretariat, enhancing its statistical coordination function and helping to strengthen the statistical systems in Africa. It takes into account the core functions of ECA as handed down by the United Nations Secretary-General and as required by the work programmes of various stakeholders in statistical development in Africa. This ensures that duplication is avoided and synergy is built among the actors. It also considers various statistical development challenges facing Africa and is built on a set of strategies aimed at overcoming them.

21. The programme has six components, namely: the African Population and Housing Censuses Programme aimed at preparing African countries to participate fully in the 2010 RPHC; re-engineering Household Surveys in Africa aimed at upgrading country-level capability to meet the increased demand for statistics that is emerging from national and international development agendas; economic statistics to support countries in their quest to comply with international standards and norms; statistical training to help countries address the issue of human resources; coordination of statistical development activities that address the issue of uncoordinated statistical development efforts; and statistical data management to provide stakeholders with quality statistics on African countries.

D. The way forward

22. This note has presented some of the major challenges facing the African continent in terms of statistical development as well as some initiatives aimed at dealing with the identified challenges. This section presents some discussion points supporting these initiatives, which aim to improve the capacity of African countries to respond to the increased demand for quality statistics.

1. The Reference Regional Strategic Framework

23. Following the endorsement of RRSF during the FASDEV meeting held in Addis Ababa from 6 to 10 February 2006, it has been recommended that AfDB and ECA agree on a joint coordination mechanism to ensure its implementation. One of the lessons learned from the past is that a good framework is not all that is needed to achieve statistical development in Africa. Stakeholders have to take actions if the framework is to be implemented, and implementation has to be closely monitored and reported.

Issues for consideration:

- *African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to support the RRSF:* Following the recommendation of the Heads of NSOs during the last FASDEV, to adopt the RRSF, there is need for strong political support from the African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development;
- *AUC to invigorate its advocacy role in favour of statistical development at the regional level:* Several meetings called upon AUC to ensure leadership support for statistical advocacy at the highest political level. Accordingly, the Executive Council of AUC requested that the latter in collaboration with ECA, AfDB and RECs take all the necessary steps to develop an African Statistics Charter as a regulatory framework for statistical development on the continent. The draft should be presented to the Executive Council in July 2007; and
- *Countries to ensure that all major national development plans and programmes include a statistical component and that statistical activities are financed mainly within the RRSF framework:* Political leadership is needed at the national level to create a culture that champions rigorous monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and evidence-based policy decisions. Increasing national financial support to statistical activities is required for sustainable statistical production and use. This reduces dependency on “donated” statistics and donor-driven statistical programmes.

2. The Africa Symposia on Statistical Development

24. The 2006 ASSD was an historic meeting as it allowed African countries to pave the way to solutions to their statistics problems on a regionally coordinated basis. Following this meeting, the Friends of ECA achieved a number of commitments during the ASSD, in a relatively short period of time.

Issues for consideration:

- *Countries to support the ASSD initiative by requesting host countries to contribute financially to its organization:* To encourage the ASSD initiative, host countries should contribute financially to organization of the meetings. This would ensure the sustainability of the initiative and allow the African statistical community to meet in 2058 (*sic*) in Cape Town; and
- *African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to support the exchange of African expertise:* Countries emerging from conflict need help to address their statistical gaps and prepare for the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses. Exchange of expertise among African countries (South-South cooperation) is one of the building blocks in this regard. There is a need to work out mechanisms that will allow NSO staff to spend time in other African countries in capacity-building activities.

3. ECA's statistical activities

25. ECA is supporting the efforts of RECs in Africa to implement continental priorities, including regional integration and meeting the special needs of the respective member States, for provision of relevant services and operational activities. These activities are mutually complementary and supportive to member States, AUC, NEPAD, and RECs. ECA has the leadership and responsibility for coordination of the United Nations system to achieve greater coherence at the regional and sub regional levels.

26. In the area of statistics, following the repositioning exercise managed under the leadership of the Executive Secretary, ECA has established the African Centre for Statistics (ACS) as a Division. This is subprogramme 9 of the overall ECA programme. Its programme of work has been prepared in close collaboration with member States and other partners so as to meet the critical needs of African countries in statistical development and to avoid duplication of work being done by other partners.

Issues for consideration:

- *African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to reaffirm the coordination and leadership role of ECA in the area of statistics and call upon partners to channel statistical development efforts through ACS: The statistical programme presented in the ECA Business Plan 2007-2009 and the Proposed Programme of Work and Priorities for 2008-2009 have a strong component dealing with coordination. To coordinate statistical activities on the continent in an effective manner, the ECA Secretariat needs to have a strong mandate emanating from its member States; and*
- *African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to support the overall programme of work of ACS: The overall ECA programme of work in statistics needs to be supported by member States through notably increased resources from international partners and from national budgets directed towards activities in the area of statistics and the strengthening of national statistical offices.*