



**UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

Twenty-seventh meeting of the Committee of Experts

26 – 29 March 2008

Forty-first session of the Economic Commission for Africa

31 March – 2 April 2008



**AFRICAN UNION
COMMISSION**

Third meeting of the Committee of Experts

Third session of CAMEF

**First Joint Annual Meetings of
the AU Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance
and ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning
and Economic Development**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



Distr.: General
E/ECA/COE/27/13
AU/CAMEF/EXP/13(III)
Date: 27 February 2008

Original: English

Coordination of Statistical Capacity Building Efforts in Africa: An African Perspective

January 2008

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Acronyms

ACBA	African Central Banks Association
ACBF	African Capacity Building Foundation
ACS	African Centre for Statistics
ASSD	Africa Symposium on Statistical Development
AfDB	African Development Bank
ASCC	African Statistical Coordination Committee
ASD	African Statistics Day
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
FASDEV	Forum on African Statistical Development
ICP-Africa	The International Comparison Programme for Africa
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MAPS	Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NSO	National Statistical Office
NSDS	National Strategy for the Development of Statistics
NSS	National Statistical System
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
REC	Regional Economic Community
RPHC	Round of Population and Housing Censuses
RRSF	Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity Building in Africa
StatCom-Africa	Statistical Commission for Africa
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division

Introduction

1. The last decades of the last millennium have witnessed a tremendous increase in the demand for quality, harmonized statistics in African countries. This unprecedented increase in the demand emanated mainly from a number of national, regional, continental, and international initiatives aimed at improving the economic, social, and political conditions of Africans.

2. Indeed, since the adoption of the 1991 Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community, African leaders have committed themselves to a common African market, increased economic self-sufficiency and promotion of endogenous and self-sustaining development of the continent. Implementation of the policies and activities contained in the Abuja Treaty and in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has been monitored with a view to achieving sustainable development and has considerably increased the demand for harmonized and reliable statistical data and information in all areas including peace and security, good governance and multilateral convergence of monetary policies for creation of a single currency.

3. Other initiatives include the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs), and other specific sectoral frameworks. As a result, African National Statistical Systems (NSSs) and subregional, regional and continental organizations dealing with statistics and statistical development have not only been challenged but also given the opportunity, *inter alia*, to raise public awareness on:

- The importance of statistics in harnessing national, subregional, regional, continental and international resources; and
- The need to build the capacities of African countries to meet the increased demand for quality and comparable statistics emanating from their development agenda.

4. This report presents some of the experience of African stakeholders in their quest to build the capacity of African countries to deliver quality and harmonized statistical data and information in support of the above mentioned initiatives. It recalls main issues confronting African countries in this endeavour as well as progress made on a regionally coordinated basis in tackling a number of the identified issues. To achieve this, African stakeholders have launched a number of initiatives including the revamping of the statistical functions within major continental organizations, namely the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and the African Development Bank (AfDB); the African Charter on Statistics; the Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity Building in Africa (RRSF); the establishment of the African Statistical Coordination Committee (ASCC); the establishment of the Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa); the Africa Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD); and the Strategy for the Establishment of a Single Currency. Furthermore, the report elaborates on the potential actions to be taken by the Ministers.

I. Issues confronting African National Statistical Systems

5. A recent assessment of NSSs during the preparation of the RRSF, reveals that many of them are trapped in a “vicious cycle” in which the shortage of funds contributes to poor performance and low-quality statistics, which in turn creates a negative view of and further lack of support and funding for statistical operations and development. Moreover, many African NSSs lack the capacity to perform even the minimum operations and cannot adapt to the new challenges or meet the new demands for data. These are some of the many issues confronting African NSSs in delivery of the quality statistical data and information needed to monitor the development initiatives and to support sound policy and decision-making. Summarized below are some of the ongoing and emerging issues that are still hampering the capacity of African NSSs:

- **Statistical harmonization in African countries:** There are many difficulties in applying international standards, concepts, methodologies and classifications on African specificities. Equally, there has been low participation by African countries in international meetings and City Groups where international methodologies are discussed and approved. The lack of adequate cooperation and coordination among African statisticians and within the broader African statistical system also hampers the comparability of data.
- **Prioritization of statistics:** Statistics are, by and large, not a priority in national development processes and among donor support programmes to countries. At national level, inadequate political commitment to statistical development has translated into low priority for statistics, inappropriate profiles of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in government hierarchy and concomitant under-funding for statistical development. Policy makers in many donor organizations are not aware of the critical nature of statistics in supporting evidence-based policy-making and monitoring. The issues are:
 - How to scale-up advocacy for mainstreaming statistics into national development processes, especially into the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs); and
 - How to mainstream and prioritize statistics in national and donor-funded programmes in Africa to give it a higher priority either as a sectoral activity or as a larger part of the priority sector programmes of donor agencies.
- **Long-term planning for statistical development:** The Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (MAPS), which is the global framework for improving national and international statistics in support of MDG monitoring, urges all poor developing countries (many of them in Africa) to design a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) by the end of 2006 and to start implementation by 2007. There are still countries where the NSDS has not been designed; there are also countries where the NSDS has been designed but implementation has been constrained by lack of adequate resources. The issue is how to ensure that all countries have an appropriately designed NSDS and resources to implement it.

- **Building the statistical capacity of African countries:** Statistical capacity is critical for long-term sustainability of NSSs and activities. Many African countries still lack capacity to undertake core statistical activities. This situation is worse in line ministries than at NSOs. Training institutions are not producing enough graduates to meet the existing demand for trained personnel. The issues are how to meet the urgent demand for trained personnel across government, and how to ensure relevance and practicality in the training programmes. The numerous concerns include:
 - The curricula of training institutions, especially universities, do not include “*official statistics*”, practical-oriented subjects, management-related subjects or new developments such as statistical data necessary for the African integration process;
 - Teaching of statistics continues to be undertaken from the supply side in spite of the overwhelming need to address demand-side issues also;
 - There is insufficient training on data analysis, presentation and dissemination; and
 - The lack of capacity in almost all African countries to generate and manage sectoral statistics across government (on health, education, agriculture, water, etc) is not being given attention and in many cases, personnel who handle sectoral statistics have not been trained.
- **International Comparison Programme for Africa (ICP-Africa):** Many African countries participated in the ICP-Africa programme (2002-2007), which AfDB coordinated. This programme assisted participating countries to strengthen their economic statistics and compilation of consumer price indexes, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and related indexes; production of Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs); and general statistical development including the design of the NSDSs. The issue is how to continue the ICP-Africa initiated activities in member States beyond 2007 when the ICP world programme has ended.
- **2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses (RPHC):** Some 17 African countries (about 30 per cent of the total) did not participate in the 2000 RPHC. As a result, about 50 per cent of the African population was not enumerated during this round of censuses. Outdated data or population projections are used in many countries to inform national development agendas and to measure progress towards the MDGs. As preparations for the 2010 RPHC gain momentum, there are about 10 African countries which may have serious problems participating in the Round. The issue is how to ensure that all African countries are galvanized to participate in the 2010 RPHC.
- **Coordination of statistical activities at all levels:** coordination of statistical activities and programmes is essential to achieve synergy, avoid duplication of effort and wasting of scarce resources, and to improve data quality and comparability. In

many countries, coordination among stakeholders, for example between data producers and users, among data producers, and between data producers and research/training institutions leaves a lot to be desired. While there is good coordination among donors at the international level, the same is not the case at country level. The issue is how to create and enhance coordination mechanisms at country, subregional, regional and continental levels among key stakeholders including donors.

6. To accelerate the pace of statistical development in the region, it is imperative that stakeholders strive to create greater awareness among data users, especially planners, policy makers and decision makers about the strategic importance of statistics in their work, particularly for evidence-based macroeconomic management, policy and decision-making, and poverty measurement and monitoring. They should also play an advocacy role to ensure that statistical production and use are given high priority by national governments and donor agencies. The private sector and civil society would also contribute to these efforts to build ample capacity for better assessing user needs and to keep abreast of the changing data needs of policy makers. Moreover, countries should be encouraged to build their capacity to harness information and communications technology (ICT) and to improve the way data are collected, managed and disseminated to users. In addition, countries should build competent user groups to understand and interpret available statistical data properly, build competencies in survey management in NSOs, and promote coordination and synergy among institutions involved in statistical activities. These are some of the issues and challenges that should be addressed to meet the increasing demand for quality statistics.

II. Initiatives Addressing the Issues Confronting African NSSs

7. There is consensus among statistical development stakeholders that for African NSSs, partnership is key to their delivery of quality and harmonized statistical data and information. Hence, the need now is to put mechanisms in place that address the issues and challenges on a regionally coordinated basis, through various past and recent initiatives. This report puts emphasis on the progress being made in this regard.

Revamping of statistical functions within major continental organizations

8. Among the positive developments that took place at the dawn of the new millennium was revamping of statistical functions in major continental organizations. This was carried out in response to repeated stakeholder demands that the issue of statistical underdevelopment in Africa be addressed.

9. Noting the importance of reliable, timely and comparable statistics in the creation of a common African currency and in the larger political, social, economic and cultural integration process of the continent, AUC recently set up a new Statistics Unit within its Department for Economic Affairs. Some Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have also set up statistical functions. AUC encourages those that have not yet set up statistical functions to do so as they constitute the pillars on which AU leans to implement its integration process. The repositioning exercise that took place at ECA in 2006/2007 resulted in the re-establishment of the Statistics

Division under the denomination: African Centre for Statistics (ACS) in August 2006. This comes in recognition of statistics as a necessary cross-cutting tool, considered vital to advancing the special needs of African countries, particularly in respect of the monitoring and evaluation of progress in reaching agreed development goals such as the MDGs. Other regional organizations also expanded their statistical activities. In addition, AfDB restructuring culminated in establishment of a Statistics Department with two divisions, one dealing with economic and social statistics and the other with statistical capacity-building, making the organization one of the major providers of statistical technical assistance on the continent.

Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (MAPS)

10. The roundtable held in Marrakech, Morocco in 2004 endorsed a time-bound and costed action plan, the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (MAPS), for improving development statistics. MAPS has six key actions for improving statistics nationally and internationally, namely:

- Mainstream strategic planning of statistical systems, especially through the implementation of an NSDS;
- Prepare for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses;
- Increase the financing for statistical capacity building;
- Set up an International Household Survey Network;
- Undertake urgent improvements for MDG monitoring; and
- Increase the accountability of the international statistical systems.

11. MAPS will be implemented in Africa using the RRSF as the implementation strategy:

Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity Building in Africa¹

12. 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), namely, AfDB, PARIS21 (the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century) and the World Bank, agreed to launch production of the RRSF under ECA leadership. This framework is expected to create synergies, avoid duplication of effort and lead to sustainable capacity for statistical development in Africa.

¹ AfDB, PARIS21, ECA, 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.

13. RRSF is a broad framework rather than a specific set of activities and policy prescriptions, recognizing that most actions will need to take place at the national level and that countries face different problems and have different priorities. The RRSF was endorsed by the Heads of NSOs in Africa and other FASDEV stakeholders in February 2006 and also by the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (CoM) in April 2007. The primary responsibility for implementing the framework lies with the NSSs, with the key drivers being NSOs, and RRSF implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting jointly undertaken by AfDB and ECA.

African Charter on Statistics

14. In order to overcome the various difficulties facing Africa in endowing itself with a well-functioning statistical system, the AU Executive Council mandated AUC, in collaboration with ECA, AfDB, NSOs, pan-African statistical organizations and others partners, to elaborate and submit an African Charter on Statistics for its consideration and adoption. The Charter should contribute to the advocacy for statistical development in Africa, promote statistics on integration and serve as a reference for the exercise of the profession of statistics, as a code of professional ethics and good conduct in the production and dissemination of statistics. It should also clarify the coordination process for statistical activity in Africa and contribute to harmonization of statistical data. Representatives of NSOs adopted the draft Charter in Rubavu, Rwanda, in June 2007, to be complemented by two studies that AUC is currently undertaking: evaluation of the African Statistics System in a study on implementation mechanisms of the Charter; and a study on creation of an AU Fund for statistical development in Africa.

Strategy for Establishment of a Single Currency

15. A joint African Union Commission-African Central Banks Association (ACBA) committee has been set up to elaborate a common strategy, including collective policies for the creation of a single monetary zone with a single currency and a continental Central Bank. In order to facilitate the multilateral surveillance, AUC and ACBA intend to harmonize monetary integration programmes and have a common macroeconomic framework for African countries involving, inter alia, the harmonization of macroeconomic concepts and definitions for making the statistical data comparable. AUC and ACBA initiated activities and studies to evaluate the methodologies used to compile macroeconomic aggregates, to analyse the conceptual and methodological differences in data sources and to establish the correspondence table between national statistics and macroeconomic aggregates of the common criteria.

National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS)

16. The NSDS is the overarching action point of MAPS and the headline RRSF strategy. MAPS urged all poor developing countries to design their NSDS by the end of 2006 and to have started implementation by the following year, with a view to producing better statistics for national and international use by the time of the next Millennium Review in 2010. The NSDS is seen as an approach that has a greater chance of improving national statistics. If properly designed and implemented following the NSDS principles developed by PARIS21 and partners, the NSDS can

fundamentally change the statistical landscape and enhance the fortunes of the statistical profession in African countries. There is a drive to get all African countries to design and implement the NSDS.

Africa Symposium on Statistical Development²

17. ASSD is a country-led initiative aimed at providing a forum where African countries can discuss issues pertaining to their statistical development on a regionally coordinated basis. The Symposium is organized in African countries on a rotational basis. It considers a number of aspects relating to development of sustainable statistical systems, addresses the challenges of capacity-building, and provides a platform for comprehensive exchange of practical experiences and best practices among African countries.

18. The first symposium took place in Cape Town, South Africa; the second in Kigali, Rwanda; and the third, in Accra Ghana. The symposia, which have been organized by ECA, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and South Africa (Chair of the Friends of ECA), have concentrated so far on sharing information and experiences on population and housing censuses.

International Comparison Programme for Africa (ICP-Africa)

19. This continent-wide programme involving 52 African countries was launched in 2002 with the objective of strengthening the capacity of African countries to provide timely and reliable data including purchasing power parity (PPP) estimates that facilitate cross-country comparisons of price levels, and economic aggregates in real terms.

20. ICP-Africa was coordinated and led (both financially and technically) by AfDB, and it has supported several African countries in designing their NSDS and establishing regional statistical training centres to improve national services.

Building the capacity of AU focal points in members States and RECs

21. Committed to playing an active and catalytic role in the area of harmonized statistics, AUC, together with partners, is organizing training programmes for focal points in its member States and RECs on Regional Integration and Statistical Harmonization. The objectives of these training programmes are to sensitize participants on priorities and challenges in statistics production related to African integration, build technical capacity in the areas of statistical data production, dissemination and analysis and share experience with regard to statistical harmonization.

Statistical Commission for Africa

22. Following the re-establishment of the Statistics Division at ECA, a new subsidiary body specifically devoted to statistics and statistical development on the continent was put in place. The last Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development held in

² For more details on the Symposium, refer to the Symposia website at <http://www.statssa.gov.za/asc/index.asp>

Addis Ababa in April 2007 endorsed creation of the subsidiary body in charge of statistics, the Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa), as the apex entity in statistical development on the continent.

23. The first meeting of StatCom-Africa took place from 21 to 24 January 2008, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The meeting called on African countries to mainstream statistics into national planning and budgeting processes to ensure that statistical activities are adequately funded and seen as a key element in the development process, rather than as an add-on. Development partners were also called on to provide sustainable technical and financial assistance for the collection, processing, analysis and use of data, particularly those needed for monitoring the MDGs. With respect to RRSF implementation, the meeting recognized that statistical development is an expensive exercise and donors play a key role in providing financing.

24. It therefore recommended that a mechanism be set up to measure statistical development and that would help donors to monitor progress made. It also called on all countries to design an NSDS to serve as an overarching framework for national statistical activities. Regarding the ICP-Africa, the meeting welcomed the work being done by AfDB, and urged the institution, in collaboration with ECA, to set up a regional national accounts programme and support the compilation of quality national accounts. On the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Census, the meeting called for increased advocacy at the highest level to ensure the commitment of African governments to undertake a population census in the 2010 round. It further called for a clear strategy for conducting the census in post-conflict countries. StatCom-Africa will meet every two years. However, its working groups will meet at least once a year to monitor progress and take strategic decisions on statistical work in Africa.

African Statistical Coordination Committee

25. Following the meeting of the representatives of AUC, AfDB, ECA, and the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) held in Tunis, Tunisia in September 2007, to discuss coordination of statistical capacity-building work in Africa, it was decided that the African Statistical Coordination Committee (ASCC) should be established to coordinate statistical activities in Africa.

Other initiatives

26. It is worth mentioning the yearly celebrations throughout Africa of African Statistics Day (ASD), 18 November, to raise awareness in society about the role and importance of statistics in the economic and social development of Africa. The theme for the 2005 celebrations was the 2010 round of population and housing censuses; for 2006 it was NSDS as a new benchmark in statistical planning, while for 2007 celebrations, the theme was measurement of employment and related indicators.

27. Effective from 2008, AfDB and ECA will jointly produce the African Statistical Yearbook and develop a joint statistical database. Besides, publication of the African Statistical Journal (ASJ) is one of the major initiatives for facilitating exchange of information and best practices among

stakeholders in the African Statistical System. AfDB is funding the publication and distribution of the journal. From 2008, this journal will become a joint publication by AfDB and ECA. Finally, ECA has initiated production of a quarterly African Statistical Newsletter, whose first issue was launched at the Africa Symposium on Statistical Development on 3 December 2007.

III. Actions to be taken by the Meeting

28. The meeting might consider:

- Calling upon African countries and development partners to give a higher priority to statistics in their development programmes, and to support mainstreaming of statistics in country development processes including the PRSs;
- Calling upon all African countries to design effective NSDSs that should, include explicitly the strategies for the production of sectoral statistics, and for development partners to assist both in the design and implementation of the NSDS;
- Calling upon development partners to support African countries to fully participate in the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses and the ASCC to develop a clear strategy for the conduct of censuses in post-conflict countries, including sharing knowledge on best practices; and support census undertaking in post-conflict countries and in other countries in difficult situations including urgent technical expertise required foremostly by the Sudan;
- Calling upon African countries and development partners to support the ongoing efforts by the AUC to provide the continent with a Charter on Statistics and contribute to its implementation;
- Calling upon all members of the African Statistical Systems and all partners to place all their activities within the framework of the African Charter on Statistics;
- Calling upon all the development partners to support AUC in implementation of the African Charter on Statistics;
- Calling upon members of the African Statistical System to provide AUC with a report on their activities on statistical harmonization;
- Calling upon AUC and RECs to strengthen the statistical function in their respective organizations;
- Calling upon partners to continue supporting AfDB in implementation of ICP-Africa beyond 2007;

- Calling upon African countries to contribute substantively to the success of the 57th Session of the International Statistical Institute (ISI) to be held in Durban in August 2009 and consider it as a continental event; and
- Support to ECA's overall programme of work in statistics and its coordination role in various bodies such as StatCom-Africa, ASCC, and others.