



Distr.: GENERAL
E/ECA/CODI/4/40

**UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

**Fourth Meeting of the Committee on
Development Information (CODI IV)**

Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia
23 – 28 April 2005

The Commission for Africa

Briefing Note on the Commission for Africa

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1. Africa's Statistical Challenges

1. There is broad consensus among African countries and development partners about the need for better statistics, (a) as a tool for evidence-based policy and planning and (b) to better support policy implementation, monitor progress and evaluate outcomes and impacts of development initiatives. However, African national statistical systems (NSS) are generally weak and unable, in their present form, to meet the unprecedented increase in demand for statistical data to inform national development processes since the 1990s.
2. In this connection, it should be emphasized in particular, that monitoring systems for the new development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), have not only created new demands but also provided frameworks for further development of African statistical systems.
3. The key issues confronting statistical development in Africa include,
 - Inadequate political commitment to statistical development especially at the national level;
 - Limited coordination, collaboration, networking and information sharing among stakeholders;
 - Inadequate resources (financial, human and technical) for statistical production;
 - Inadequate infrastructure (physical and statistical) for statistical production;
 - Limited institutional capacity;
 - Poor quality data;
 - Inadequate data management (archiving, analysis, and dissemination) systems;
 - Lack of long-term planning for statistical development; and,
 - Inappropriate profiles of National Statistical Offices in government hierarchy.
4. It is therefore imperative for African countries to engage in a statistical development process that can ensure that they are equipped, with statistical systems capable of supporting their economic, political and social development efforts, in a sustainable manner.
5. In this context, specific challenges facing those delivering National Statistical Systems (NSS) in Africa include:

- Creating greater awareness among data users and especially planners, policy makers and decision makers about the strategic importance of statistics in their work, particularly in evidence-based macro-economic management, policy making and poverty measurement and monitoring;
- Playing an advocacy role to ensure that statistical production and use are given high priority by national governments;
- Building ample capacity to make user needs assessments for data of improved quality and keep abreast of the changes in society and the economy the data needs of policy makers, the private sector and civil society;
- Building capacity to harness technology and to improve the way data are collected and disseminated to users;
- Building competent user groups (Policy makers, researchers ,media) to properly understand and interpret available statistical data;
- Building competence in Survey Management in National Statistical Offices;
- Reactivating key regional statistical programmes such as the African Household Survey Capability Programme (AHSCP), the National Accounts Capability Programme (NACP) and the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA); and,
- Promoting co-ordination and synergy among institutions involved in statistical activities.

2. Current Activities to Strengthen National Statistical Systems

6. During the past few years, a number of positive steps have been taken to strengthen National Statistical Systems in the African region.

2.1. At the national level:

7. In many African countries, national statistical systems are weak, and characterized by inadequate supply of resources and low profile in government hierarchy. To address these weaknesses some countries have designed or are in the process of designing Statistics Master Plans that would provide a “road map” for the development of national statistics and an integrated framework for harnessing both national and international resources for building sustainable statistical capacity. Short, medium and long-term programmes covering all classic statistical areas have been provided for in these Master Plans. Those countries that have not yet developed Statistics Master Plans have been encouraged to do so in order to improve their national statistics.

8. In some countries, the Master plans did not anticipate new challenges that emerged after the plans were launched, whilst others did not include strategies to sustain the current statistical activities including large-scale operations such as population census and agriculture and household surveys.
9. The Partnership In Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS 21) Consortium has prepared guidelines for the design of National Strategy for the Development of Statistics. Within the context, the profile of the National Statistics Offices will be enhanced to enable them play an effective role as the coordinator and standard-setter for the national statistical systems. In addition, statistical legislation will be reviewed with a view to making it more relevant to the current situation. It is important to mention that there are some best practices in the management of national statistics and these can be very useful in the peer review process for developing statistics in Africa.

2.2. At the sub-regional level

10. In the sub-regional context, the statistical system comprises the Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-saharan Africa (AFRISTAT), which was created to support its member states, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Country Support Teams (CSTs) and the statistical divisions and units of regional economic bodies including Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC), West African Monetary (WAMZ), West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC), as well as the statistical component of International Monetary Fund (IMF) African Technical Assistance Centres (AFRITACs).
11. In order to assess the economic and social integration process and to achieve greater comparability across countries and over time, the sub-regional economic groupings have created statistical bodies aimed at strengthening statistical systems in their respective sub-regions.
12. The main focus of the statistics units of the sub-regional organizations is the harmonization of national statistics and building sustainable capacity through training. In this connection, these sub-regional organizations organize periodic meetings of Heads of National Statistics Offices as well as technical meetings and workshops to address common issues such as data gaps, harmonization of statistical definitions and concepts, and methodologies, and lack of expertise in specific areas.

2.3. At the regional level

13. At the regional level, the African statistical system includes the ECA and the African Development Bank (ADB), the sub-Committee on Statistics of the Committee on Development Information (CODI), the Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa (ABSA), the Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV) and the Food and Alimentation Organization (FAO) African Commission on Agricultural Statistics (AFCAS). Details on these organisations are provided in an annex to this document.
14. ECA has assisted in building and strengthening capacity of African countries in various areas of statistical development, through the provision of advisory services, preparation of guidelines for statistical needs assessment, strategy development and, group training activities; preparation and adaptation of handbooks and manuals; and co-ordination of technical cooperation.
15. During the period 1970-93, ECA launched five regional technical assistance programmes with the support of bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies. These programmes had great impact on the development process of African statistics. The programmes were: the African Census Programme, the African Household Survey Capability Programme, the National Accounts Capability Programme, the Statistical Training Programme for Africa, and the Statistical Development Programme for Africa.
16. However, the amount of ECA's technical assistance to African countries declined drastically when funding from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNFPA for the Commission's major regional co-operation programmes ceased in 1993. It is hoped that ECA can again play a leading role in the pursuit of the objectives of this Framework.
17. ADB also has provided funding for stand-alone statistical projects, and statistical components have been incorporated in some projects funded by the Bank in various African countries. The Bank also collects, processes and publishes data on member countries as well as on co-operation for Africa's development. Since 2002, the Bank has been coordinating the African component of the millennium International Comparison Programme (ICP).

2.4. At the international level

18. Over the years, international organizations, bilateral and multilateral donors have played an important role in funding statistical programmes and projects at regional, sub-regional and country level and also in the development of methodologies and frameworks for collecting and handling statistical data and the organization of working groups to review them. At country level, technical and financial assistance was mainly given to meet specific short-term data needs. Moreover, the assistance was mainly done in a piecemeal and uncoordinated manner.

19. Statistical activities originally funded by donor assistance could not be sustained when such assistance came to an end. Because of the pressure to meet urgent data needs, short-term projects and programmes have generally taken precedence over long-term planning. This approach has in a number of cases: (a) distorted national priorities for statistical production and led to lack of synergy and cost-effectiveness in data production, (b) led to production of conflicting and largely inaccurate data, and (c) not engendered sustainable capacity for production of national statistics.
20. As a result, there is now an urgent need to rationalize and prioritize demands on NSOs, so as to provide opportunity for these NSOs to develop their own national plans and programmes that would ensure a more sustainable system of data production and management.

3. Action Plan in Support of Statistical Development in Africa

21. An Action plan in support of statistical development in Africa should focus on the following activities :
22. **Building Institutional Statistical Capacities**, especially by: (i) promoting the establishment of a conducive legislative environment that underpins the functions and operations of National Statistical Systems and National Statistical Offices and promotes professional independence and autonomy in statistical production; (ii) raising the profile of National Statistical Offices by making them autonomous agencies of government; and (iii) ensuring that National Statistical Offices are better resourced and capable of coordinating and becoming a standard-setter for the National Statistical System;
23. **Enhancing human resources development in statistics and related areas** by, inter-alia: (i) providing teaching consultancy to African Statistical Training Centres, especially in specialized areas; (ii) developing training materials and supplying equipment (computers, books, etc..) to facilitate teaching at the centers; (iii) encouraging women to do statistics at all levels; (iv) strengthening the linkages training centers and the National Statistical Systems to ensure the relevance of the training programmes to the national social and economic challenges; (v) setting up a fellowship programme for the benefit of professional and middle-level statisticians from African countries; and, (vi) promoting partnerships between statistical training centers and other centers of excellence teaching statistics within and outside Africa;
24. **Promoting Household Surveys** , by : (i) assessing country needs in the area of integrated household surveys, including time use surveys which are critical for the measurement of African women's real contribution in national economies to guide policy making and resource allocation; (ii) upgrading national capabilities for planning and conducting household surveys; and, (iii) providing technical assistance and

advisory services to countries in the processing, analysis and dissemination of household surveys data;

25. **Strengthening national capacities in the implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts (1993 SNA)**, with emphasis on the provision of advisory services, group training, development and/or dissemination of methodological guidelines, manuals and software and, research activities
26. **Promoting the Development of Statistical Databases**, by : (i) assisting countries in identifying user needs and data sources as well as in re-organizing existing statistical information systems, with a view to responding to data needs emerging from new development frameworks and initiatives such as the NEPAD , the PRSPs and the MDGs; (ii) developing, maintaining and net-working statistical systems at all levels; (iii) promoting the use of Information and communication technologies including geographic information systems for statistical production; (iv) building capacities at all levels to develop and maintain databases; and, (v) establishing a regional data hub and a system of networks and of regional data management;
27. **Establishing Peer Review Processes** to enhance statistical governance in the African Region, through (i) rolling workshops in five sub- regional centers to build capacities for production of accurate, timely and reliable statistical data; and, (ii) the establishment of a panel of external evaluators from both African and international centers of excellence to review the quality and integrity of country data and help establish an authoritative repository of data.
28. **Promoting and Coordinating Statistical Activities in Africa:** (i) through statistical policy development, coordination and harmonization at the regional level; (ii) by supporting country participation at co-ordination meetings on statistical development in Africa at all levels, such as CODI, ABSA, FASDEV, the International Comparison Programme for Africa (ICP-Africa) Governing Board, and PARIS21 Consortium; (iii) collaborating in the various areas of statistical development with sub-regional organizations and economic groupings such as ECOWAS, SADC, WAMZ, UEMOA, CEMAC, COMESA, EAC, as well as the statistical component of the IMF African Technical Assistance Centres; (iv) disseminating “good practice” examples, technical manuals and guidelines; (v) promoting networking among sub-regions in Africa; and, (vi) improving information flow and communication on statistical activities in Africa by increasing the use of ICT and, publishing Regional Statistical Newsletters and other technical publications.

APPENDIX: Existing Instruments at Regional Level for the Promotion of Statistical Development in Africa

I. COMMITTEE ON DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION (CODI)

The Committee on Development Information (CODI) is one of the seven subsidiary bodies of the Economic Commission for Africa, established in 1997 by the twenty-third meeting of the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning. As a subsidiary body of the Commission, CODI provides policy and technical guidance reviews the ECA programmes of support to member States in the following areas: information and communication technologies; statistical development; database development and management; geo-information and library, documentation and information services.

II. ADVISORY BOARD ON STATISTICS IN AFRICA (ABSA)

The Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa (ABSA), as proposed by CODI, was established by the ECA Conference of Ministers. ABSA meets once a year, but additional emergency meetings may be called. The inaugural session of ABSA was held during the third meeting of CODI in May 2003. ABSA's functions are:

- To advise the ECA secretariat on emerging issues relating to statistical development in Africa, as well as the direction and content of its work programme;
- To propose approaches, actions and means for the mobilization of resources for the implementation of regional statistical programmes;
- To advise on the implementation of any strategy or framework recommended by CODI for the development of statistics in Africa;
- To advise on the coordination of statistical activities at national, sub-regional and regional levels;
- Promote and disseminate good practices in the area of statistical development to all stakeholders, including member States and sub-regional organizations.

III. FORUM ON AFRICAN STATISTICAL DEVELOPMENT (FASDEV)

The Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV) was launched at its first meeting held at ECA, in Addis Ababa, from 12 to 13 May 2004. The Forum was launched and convened by ECA, the African Development Bank (ADB) and the Partnership In Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) Consortium. FASDEV was initiated in order to: (i) have an overview and better coordinate statistical activities in Africa, including technical cooperation and assistance, and training; (ii) set up

a permanent system for the monitoring of statistical development in Africa; and (iii) strengthen modalities for cooperation with a view to leveraging on each partner's comparative advantage. FASDEV's membership includes donor institutions, UN specialized agencies, and regional and sub-regional organizations.