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Report on the follow-up to ABSA recommendations

Report on the follow-up to ABSA-I

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I. Introduction

1. The first meeting of the Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa (ABSA) was held at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Addis Ababa, from 10 to 11 May 2004 back to back with the first meeting of the Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV) convened from 12 to 13 May 2004. The meeting reviewed and took actions on the following items:

- Strategic Framework for Statistical Development in Africa
- Statistics at ECA: A Framework for Action

2. The Board called upon the secretariat to undertake a number of actions with respect to statistical development in the region as well as at ECA. However, all recommendations are not only directed to ECA. This document reports on the implementation of some of those actions, the constraints faced as well as some corrective measures for a better and effective achievement of the objectives of the Board. As far as possible, this report also will include prominent actions taken by other stakeholders.

II. Follow-up Activities

II.1. Strategic Framework for Statistical Development in Africa

3. The document entitled “Statistical Development in Africa: A Strategic Framework” was aimed at guiding future statistical capacity building activities in the region. The framework will in particular be focused on strategic direction and appropriate implementation instruments for improving the planning, financing, management, and coordination of statistical development activities. It is expected that this new framework, once adopted by all stakeholders, will help create much needed synergies, reduce duplication of efforts and lead to sustainable statistical capacity building activities in the African region. The document contents the following items on which the Board made recommendations:

- The current and foreseen statistical activities in Africa
- Statistical master plans
- Representation of African countries in international fora
- System for monitoring and implementation of African development agendas
- Networking and information sharing
- Peer Review mechanism

- Gender mainstreaming of statistical activities

1. The Current and Foreseen Statistical Activities in Africa

4. The Board recommended to enhance the exercise of taking stock of the current and foreseen statistical activities in the region by making sure that all the activities are taken into account, and providing relevant details/profiles about the activities and initiatives, including the beneficiaries, their time frames, geographic coverage, funding by source and amounts, etc.

5. A Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV) meeting was organized just after the second meeting of ABSA and reviewed, among others, the same documents presented to ABSA. Then the Forum agreed to contribute to the production of a Reference Regional Strategy Framework under ECA coordination based on the draft presented (Statistical Development in Africa: A Strategic Framework) and the comments made in line with the Marrakech Action Plan on Statistics (MAPS).

6. The representatives of the primary sponsors of the FASDEV meeting, namely, ADB, ECA, PARIS 21, and the World Bank, joined by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) discussed, at the Tunis meeting, the modalities for the elaboration of the reference document. They agreed to hire three consultants to draft the document. The consultants are expected to work no more than 180 days among them in the period of 9 months starting April 2005.¹ The following table sets a tentative timeline for the assignment:

Recruitment of consultants	April 2005
Briefing session at UNECA, Task assignment	April 2005
Desk work, Selection of countries to be studied	April 2005
Field assessment	May-June 2005
First draft	July 2005
Circulation of first draft among stakeholders	August 2005
Second draft	September 2005
Submission of final draft to UNECA, Debriefing session at UNECA	Late-October 2005
FASDEV second meeting	Late-October 2005

¹ The funding institutions (ADB, PARIS21 and World Bank) will determine the exact period and the number of work-months required for each of the three consultants.

7. As mentioned in the above table, the final draft of the Reference Regional Strategy Framework (this title may change at the end of the process) will be submitted to FASDEV during its second meeting scheduled to take place at ECA Headquarters, late-October 2005. This final draft will reflect all the recommendations made by the second meeting of ABSA.

2. Statistical Master Plans

8. The Board pointed out the need for countries to elaborate statistical master plans taking into account their own conditions. These plans should be designed to support policy initiatives, provide a road map for the development of the whole statistical system and be used for resources mobilizations. It is worth noting that there is a consensus to use “National Strategies for the Development of Statistics” (NSDSs) for the denomination of such statistical master plans also named strategic plans for the development of statistics or statistical development plans, etc.

9. The FASDEV also urged African countries to comply with the recommendation made in the MAPS to design and implement the NSDSs by 2006, using the Guidelines elaborated by PARIS 21. It is worth mentioning that a similar recommendation was also made by the second meeting of the ECA Committee on Development Information (CODI-II) held in September 2001, and later by the Yaoundé Declaration stated during the second regional seminar of the International Comparison Programme (ICP-Africa) held in April 2003.

10. PARIS 21 organized three subregional workshops on the NSDS for (i) the East African francophone countries in Addis Ababa, from 2 to 4 December 2004; (ii) the West African francophone countries in Bamako, from 7 to 9 February 2005; (iii) the Central African francophone countries in Bamako from 10 to 12 February 2005. PARIS 21 also organized an Informal Meeting on Including Sectoral Statistics in National Strategies for the Development of Statistics. The NSDS workshop for Portuguese-speaking countries is scheduled to take place in Bissau, from 3 to 5 May 2005. These workshops aim at (i) presenting the rationale of this process and the content of the Guidebook, and (ii) assisting the representatives of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) to prepare a road map for the elaboration of their NSDSs.

3. Representation of African Countries in International Fora

11. The Board noted with great concern the low level of representation of African countries in international fora. Then it recommended that (i) ECA should convene meetings leading to a regional position before main international statistical events, and organize working groups on various subjects such as international standards, methodologies, and frameworks; and (ii) development partners should finance the participation of representatives of African countries to these meetings.

12. ECA, in collaboration with its partners, is planning to convene at least one meeting before the next session of the United National Statistical Commission. Regarding the working groups, ECA intends, through a development account project to put emphasis on gender-disaggregated data and the satellite accounts of household production (SAHP). ECA has already embarked in the revised SCAN-ICT that deals with information society statistics. Moreover, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) development account project on “Measurement of the informal sector” will give opportunity to information sharing on this issue. Of course ECA should do far more on this issue but budgetary constraints keep on impeding its will to better serve its member States in the field of Statistics.

13. Thanks to the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), PARIS 21, The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Kingdom Department For International Development (DFID), etc, some directors of NSOs were able to attend the 36th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission held, in New York, from 1 to 4 March 2005.

4. System for Monitoring and Implementation of African Development Agendas

14. The Board recommended that the statistical community in Africa should work closely with other stakeholders to establish system for monitoring the implementation of African development agendas such as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSPs), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

15. This recommendation is very important and started taking shape. Indeed, AFRISTAT held, in Bamako, from 7 to 12 March 2005, a meeting on an Information System Framework for the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and MDGs Monitoring and Evaluation. This project concerns only the Sub-Saharan African Francophone Countries and aims at developing not only the above-mentioned framework but also a common and minimum methodological support for the Information System to be used for the PRSPs and MDGs Monitoring and Evaluation.

16. ECA, through the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), is undertaking a research on “An Analytical Framework for NEPAD”. In this context work has to be undertaken to provide the statistics component of such a framework.

5. Networking and Information Sharing

17. The Board recommended that networking and information sharing should be encouraged and promoted among producers and users in countries; among subregional

and regional organizations; and among donors agencies and international organizations at all levels.

18. This is a constant concern of ECA as well as the African statistical community. Significant steps have been taken to this end by ECA through the setting up of a website dedicated to Statistics activities, a biannual newsletter, the organisation of the meetings of the Sub-committee on Statistics, its participation in FASDEV, etc. Moreover, subregional organizations such as AFRISTAT, through several meetings they organized, have overcome the NSOs' isolation. It is worth mentioning AFRISTAT, UNSD, and ECOWAS assistance to NSOs in setting up Internet facilities and websites, etc. Regarding the development partners, the information sharing system that will be put in place soon will be important to this end.

6. Peer Review Mechanism

19. The Board, in connection with the recommendation in the previous heading, noted the need to develop appropriate peer review methodologies and to embark upon in this process.

20. The secretariat was unable to achieve this recommendation due to financial and human resource constraints. Nevertheless, the secretariat has drafted a concept paper on the peer review of national statistical systems that could be seen as an input to a project document to be submitted to partners for extra budgetary fund raising.

21. D'ores et déjà, ECA has given a most important role in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) by the African Union Commission. This should normally be seen as an opportunity for ECA to push forward the statistical component of this process.

7. Gender Mainstreaming of Statistical Activities

22. The Board asked for reforms of the national statistical systems in order (i) to introduce regular household surveys, including time use studies, as part of the normal data collection processes to generate vital gender-disaggregated data; and to adopt the Satellite Accounts Household Production (SAHP) to provide a database for strategic and policy analysis to identify more equitable and sustainable development options.

23. These issues are being addressed by ECA, through the programme of work of the African Centre for Gender and Development (ACGD). Moreover the United Nations Development Account project on Gender and Statistics is an opportunity for ACDG and the ECA Statistics Team to collaborate in these issues.

II.2. Statistics at ECA: A Framework for Action

24. The document entitled “Statistics at ECA: A Framework for Action” aimed at assessing the current status of statistics function at ECA and proposing the elements of programme capable to rework the activities of the Statistics Team within the Commission and in the member States. The document contains the following items on which the Board made recommendations:

- ECA staffing situation
- The scope of ECA statistical work programme
- Statistical database development
- Advocacy for Statistics
- ECA and the Statistical Training Centres (STCs)
- The name of the ECA division in charge of Statistics

1. ECA Staffing Situation

25. The statistics team at ECA, as per the last ABSA meeting in May 2004, is functioning with four regular-budgeted professional staff members, a regional adviser on Organization and Management of National Statistical Systems, and six General Service (GS) posts. Stakeholders, partners and ECA itself considered this staffing situation as a serious impediment to the completion of statistical activities given the growing needs in statistical developments as stated in the ABSA launching meeting report.

26. In fact, since the last ABSA meeting, the Statistics Team has observed the retirement of three professional staff members and the loss of two statistical assistants, one having moved to the professional level in another division while another left the Commission.

27. Accordingly, during the recruitment process launched to fill the vacant positions that resulted from all these changes, the Commission has recruited three professionals as part of the regular-budget professional posts. Two of the newly recruited staff members joined the Commission in September and October 2004 while the latest one joined the team at the beginning of January 2005. In addition, two statistical assistants were hired in 2004. Meanwhile, the Commission has also hired two consultants for a period of six months from February to July 2004 to support the Statistics Team before the arrival of the newly recruited staff members. Moreover, an informatics consultant has been hired, since July 2004, to implement the ECA database project. The net effect to date is a total of four professional posts, one regional adviser, and six statistical assistants.

2. The scope of ECA statistical work programme

28. Taking into account the new African development agenda and the dazzling evolution of information and communication technologies and their impact on the societies, the Board recommended that ECA should expand the scope of their programmes of work in order to include social statistics and indicators for the MDGs and NEPAD and assist its member states to begin producing information society statistics in a harmonized framework.

29. Under the leadership of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), several meetings were held to discuss issues related to information society statistics and to agree upon a list of indicators relevant to monitor the progress in this field. Such a list will be made available to the participants.

3. Statistical Database Development

30. The Board, while recognizing the importance of database development at ECA, recommended that ECA should assist countries to develop their socio-economic statistical databases, which could then be networked.

31. The Commission has developed a prototype model for the ECA regional statistical database following a comprehensive data needs assessment conducted during the third quarter of 2004. It is expected that the new regional information system would provide, when completed, a prime source of statistical data directly accessible to potential users within and outside the Commission. For the time being, there is no plan to assist countries in developing their own database due to lack of financial resources.

4. Advocacy for Statistics

32. Concerning advocacy issues, the Board stressed the need to have comprehensive plans with clear messages, targets, time frames and partnerships arrangements for their implementation.

33. To date, ECA prime tool for statistical advocacy is the African Statistics Day. The celebrations of the Day offers the opportunity to increase public awareness on the important role which statistics has to play in adequate policy decision-making taking into account the recent political developments and good governance preoccupations. It is worth mentioning that, for the first time, there was radio coverage of the event in November 2004. In fact, PARIS21 managed to bring *Radio France International (RFI)* to cover the African Statistics Day. Meanwhile, in member states, many seminars, open discussions were organized around the retained theme and on emerging issues arising from the promotion of the statistical development in Africa.

34. PARIS 21 whose mandate includes statistical advocacy has produced several materials for this purpose, namely two videos on “Measuring the Change in World Poverty” and “Statistics for Development”, and a report on “The Role of Statistics in Evidence-based Policy-making”.

5. ECA and the Statistical Training Centres (STCs)

35. Concerning statistical training centres (STCs), the Board has asked ECA to cooperate with them in order: (i) to review the programmes with respect to the new development agenda in order to make statistical work relevant to it; (ii) to provide them with teaching materials; and (iii) to organize short courses and workshops in selected areas.

36. Indeed ECA did a lot in the past to support the STCs, from creating STC to harmonizing curricula of African STCs, conducting a comparative study between the French-speaking and English-speaking STCs, providing short term teachers to STCs, etc. All these activities were undertaken through the Statistical Training Programme in Africa (STPA).

37. Since the end of this programme, the rare ECA interventions were reduced to the organization of seminars on Organization and Management of Statistical Systems in the French-speaking STCs. ECA will explore the possibility to cooperate with partners on this issue.

6. The Name of the ECA Division in Charge of Statistics

The board proposed a new name for the Division in charge of Statistics at ECA. It must be recalled that the ECA Executive Secretary, at the closing ceremony of the second meeting of ABSA stated that the change of the name of a division involves more many other factors than the ones taken into account by this meeting. Thus, to date, the statistics function remains in the Economic and Social Policy Division.

III. Conclusion

38. The follow-up process of the production of a regional strategic framework that will be a reference for all stakeholders in statistical capacity building in Africa is on track. The next important step will be the meeting of FASDEV where all partners are expected to discuss the document and agree on a approval process. This will help create much-needed synergies, reduce duplication of efforts and lead to sustainable statistical capacity building activities in the African region. This should be recognized as a significant step in partnership in the area of statistics.

39. Regarding Statistics at ECA, commendable efforts have been done in the staffing but it is worth recognizing that more can be done in order to meet the recommendations formulated by the Board in this regard.