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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

First Meeting of Statistical Commission for Africa

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
20 – 24 January 2008

**TERMS OF REFERENCE OF
THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
(STATCOM-AFRICA)**

I. Background

1. Since its inception, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) had set up subsidiary bodies as part of the machinery to enforce its mandate in different thematic areas. In the case of Statistics, these were: the Conference of African Statisticians established in 1959, a year after the inception of ECA; the Joint Conference of Planners, Statisticians, and Demographers including a Committee on Statistics resulting from a merger of the Conference of African Statisticians, the Conference of African Planners, and the Conference of African Demographers in 1980; the Joint Conference of Planners, Statisticians, Population and Information Specialists in 1994 when Information specialists joined the previous body; and the Committee on Development Information (CODI) established in 1997 by the twenty-third Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development. CODI was set up to provide policy and technical guidance for the sub-programme “harnessing information for development” and comprises three Sub-committees on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Statistics, and Geo-information.
2. Nevertheless, one of the recurrent recommendations emanating from the meetings of the Sub-Committee on Statistics, the Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa (ABSA)¹, and the Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV)², was to raise the profile of statistics at ECA and subsequently to provide the African Statistical Community with a forum where focus could be put on and enough time devoted to issues specifically related to statistical development in Africa. In 2006, on the initiative of Statistics South Africa, the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) of nine countries were mandated by 43 African countries gathered in Cape Town during the first African Symposium on Statistical Development (2006 ASSD),³ to form a group called “Friends of ECA in Statistical Development” in order to: (a) to engage ECA on various statistical challenges and needs facing the region that requires ECA’s involvement and leadership; and (b) to work with ECA to re-establish a sustainable programme for statistics in Africa.
3. In response to these calls, and taking into account the fact that statistical information is of utmost importance with respect to the major development challenges in Africa as

¹ The functions of the ABSA are to: (i) advise the ECA secretariat on emerging issues relating to statistical development in Africa, as well as the direction and content of its work programme; (ii) propose approaches, actions and means for the mobilization of resources for the implementation of regional statistical programmes; (iii) advise on the implementation of any strategy or framework recommended by CODI for the development of statistics in Africa; (iv) advise on the coordination of statistical activities at national, subregional and regional levels; and (v) promote and disseminate good practices in the area of statistical development to all stakeholders, including member States and sub-regional organizations.

² FASDEV was initiated in order to: (i) have an overview of statistical activities, including assistance, and training in Africa; (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.

³ ASSD is a country-led initiative aiming at: (i) deliberating on issues of statistical development and the challenges that are posed for the NSSs in Africa; (ii) encouraging all African countries to undertake a Population and Housing Census in the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses (RPHC); (iii) focusing and fostering linkages in MDG-related statistical activities and census campaigns; and (iv) providing a platform for a comprehensive exchange of experiences, countries’ participation, technical assistance, information and data dissemination.

identified in framework of the ECA repositioning exercise (namely: achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); integrating for development; benefiting from globalization; and strengthening institutions and capacity development), the ECA established, in August 2007, an African Centre for Statistics (ACS). The ACS will: (a) undertake research, carry out studies, provide technical assistance to improve the range and quality of data for policy analysis and decision-making especially with regard to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) objectives, and (b) embark on harmonization and coordination of programmes, methods, concepts and standards, and in the development and networking of the national, sub-regional and regional statistical and information systems.

4. Finally, the African Union Commission (AUC) decided to be more involved in statistical development in support of its new vision and in order to better monitor and evaluate its plan of action. One of the recommendations of its seminar on "Harmonization of Statistics in Africa" held in Bamako in October 2006 was to put in place an African Statistical System (ASS) and to prepare an African Statistics Charter. The Executive Council of the African Union composed of Heads of States, taking note of the Declaration of the Conference of African Ministers of Economy and Finance held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in November 2006, resolved and decided on the elaboration of an African Statistics Charter (Doc. EX.CL/308 (X)) and requested the Commission to submit the draft Charter to the Executive Council in July 2007.

The terms of reference of CODI can not cope with the expected expanded role and responsibilities resulting from the revamping of statistics at ECA, the several statistical initiatives in the region, the commitment of AUC and the general interest of the international community to support statistical development in the African region. It is in such a context that the Statistical Commission for Africa (STATCOM-Africa) will be set up.

II. Mandate

5. STATCOM-Africa shall be the apex statistical body at the continental level where ASSD, ABSA, FASDEV, and other initiatives shall report. STATCOM-Africa shall act within the framework of the policies and procedures of the United Nations and subject to the general supervision of the ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance and Economic Development. Taking into account the planned mechanisms with regard to the African Statistical System (ASS), it shall provide a forum for discussion and decision-making on all aspects of statistical development of interest to its members. In particular it may:
 - a. Promote the development of national statistical systems of the region, and the improvement of the quality and comparability of statistics they produce in line with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics;
 - b. Promote the African Statistics Charter prepared under the coordination of the AUC;
 - c. Ensure coordination with the United Nations Statistical Commission to map out actions to be taken by the ACS to ensure sustainable development of statistics in Africa.
 - d. Ensure the coordination of statistical work of the various actors and mechanisms and their implementation in the continent;

- e. Examine progress, identify problems, and propose solutions to existing and emerging issues on statistical development in Africa;
- f. Promote exchange of experiences, peer learning, technical cooperation, and data sharing among African countries and institutions;
- g. Examine, globally and within Africa, emerging trends in statistical development and present the state of knowledge;
- h. Participate in the establishment of methodologies, norms and standards at the international level and oversee the adoption of these internationally agreed methodologies, norms and standards and practices in line with African specificities;
- i. Review the relevance of regional statistical training and the on-job-training programmes to the needs of the countries of the region and promote the training of African statisticians;
- j. Advocate in favour of resource mobilization and technical cooperation in support of statistical development in Africa;
- k. Consider and make recommendations on the statistical work programme of the African Centre for Statistics;
- l. Promote the collection and dissemination of internationally comparable statistics of ECA member States as required by policy makers, enterprises, researchers and the general public in particular in the continent;
- m. Ensure the dissemination of the results of its work to national statistical offices, sub-regional, regional, and international organizations, enterprises or any other user; and
- n. Recommend studies that may be required to further the objectives of the Statistical Commission for Africa and the African Statistical System.

III. Membership

6. The heads of the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) of ECA member States shall be the members of the Commission.

IV. Observers

7. The statistical entities of African regional and sub-regional organizations; representatives of data users of African countries; African inter-governmental organizations; the United Nations Statistics Department (UNSD); United Nations agencies; the Bretton Woods institutions; and non-governmental organizations active in statistical work shall be invited to the meetings of STATCOM-AFRICA as observers.

V. Officers

8. The Commission shall elect a Bureau comprising a Chairperson, two Vice-Chairpersons and two Rapporteurs for a two-year term, renewable once for one of the Vice-Chairpersons. Elections are held at the beginning of a session. The criteria for the election of the officers shall be as follows: geography, language and gender. In between sessions of the Commission, members of the Commission, the Bureau and the Secretariat shall

consult on the election of the bureau for the upcoming session. Nominations shall be made by member(s) of the Commission.

9. The Commission may nominate some of its members to stand as “The Friends-of-the-chair”. Their main responsibilities shall be as back up to the bureau on specific tasks. Similarly, working groups would be set up to prepare thematic reports for the consideration of the Commission.

VI. Sessions

10. The Commission shall meet over three days, once every two years. The session must be held before the United Nations Statistical Commission and the ECA Conference of Ministers, which will consider its meeting report. The Commission shall propose dates for the sessions taking account of the above requirements. The Secretariat shall notify the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of ECA member States and send a copy of the letter of invitation to their embassies based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and invite them to identify their representatives.
11. Work at sessions of the Commission shall be organized in plenary meetings. Committees could be set up in parallel in order to discuss specific issues, if need be, and/or draft resolutions of the Commission. ECA will substantively service the sessions of the Commission and provide registration services and ground passes for admission to the Conference rooms. The sessions shall normally be held from 09:00 to 13:00 and 14:30 up to 17:30.
12. Prior to each session of the Commission, the Secretariat shall prepare an agenda, which may be based on requests of the Commission at previous sessions, or based on requests by member States or other bodies such as the ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, the United Nations Statistical Commission, the ASS Committees, ABSA, ASSD, and FASDEV. In any case, it shall reflect the multi-year programme of work that the Commission shall develop. During each session, the Commission may decide to add additional items to the agenda, based on documentation and discussion at the session, and priorities or problems that may emerge. On the basis of this list, the Commission shall propose a provisional agenda for the next subject to further review by the Commission’s Bureau.
13. Documents of a session of the Commission shall be limited to 16 pages in length. They shall be concise and action oriented and available in English and French. Documents shall be issued well in advance of the session and made available on the ECA website. They shall also be distributed during the session.
14. Background documents shall be made available to the Commission. These shall contain information from participants and the Secretariat, which are of potential interest to the Commission. They will require clearance by the Secretariat prior to distribution and adequate copies will be made available by their authors. The Secretariat shall not be responsible of the translation of such documents. These documents should be informative enough to avoid lengthy oral statements. Finally, room documents could be made available, for information, during the session at the initiative of their authors without any responsibility of the Secretariat.

15. Members and observers are encouraged to participate fully in the deliberations of the Commission. The Commission should increasingly call for more focused, issue-oriented and succinct interventions by those participating in the discussions. It should also emphasize that detailed expositions of methodology or the reporting of routine activities should not be presented orally but rather be made available in writing as background documents which can be made available to participants.

VII. Monitoring and Reporting

16. Each member State shall submit a progress report of its activities to the secretariat at least two months and half before the next meeting of the Commission.
17. A report of the plenary and committees meetings shall be agreed to at the final plenary of each session of the Commission. This report shall be submitted to the ECA Conference of Ministers for the consideration and adoption.

VIII. Others

18. Member States and agencies shall bear the cost of their attendance at the sessions of the Commission. Except as provided for herein, the Rules of Procedure of the ECA shall, where relevant, apply to the sessions of the Commission.