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Regional Workshop on Statisticians

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Manzini, Swaziland

AIDE MEMOIRE

I. Background

At the core of any development effort is the need for governments and other key stakeholders to measure and benchmark progress towards regionally and internationally agreed development goals such as the NEPAD and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There are standard development indicators and targets set and also comparison tools developed for countries and regions to track progress. All the measurement tools and indicators would be meaningless without appropriate and reliable statistical data and information. Across Africa many sub-regions and indeed countries lack the very basic source of statistical information flow that should have been available on annual basis as well as down to the lowest administrative level that is critical in tracking development targets and outcomes.

It is generally noted that many African countries particularly in the sub-region face increasing challenges in the collection, measurement and usage of statistics thus impairing decision making processes. There is also the problem of lack of comparability and credibility among data sets due to different methodologies employed to collect the data. In order to address some of these challenges at the continental level, the United Nations African Centre for Statistics was established. Its overall objective is to strengthen capacities for statistical development at national, sub regional and regional levels, including the promotion of the development of improved and integrated statistical databases in support of decision-making and policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation. Through the African Centre for Statistics it is hoped that a community of practice which is well versed with generation, management and usage of statistics that can foster evidence-based policy-making. Despite these well-intentioned measures, data and statistical challenges abound in many countries and regions.

II. Context and Justification

Timely, reliable, comparable and available statistical data on social, gender, demographic, economic and environmental conditions are important factors for the planning of Africa's development. The basis for this information is nationally produced statistics. Statistics provide the information, or the evidence, needed for governments' daily administration and policy analyses; policymakers' planning; businesses' decisions; and citizens' possibility to hold their government accountable¹. Overall, statistics provide the basis for evidence-based policy decisions.

ECA's analytical and substantive policy work is underpinned and informed by heavy usage of statistical data. As a first port of call for data collection and analysis, ECA works closely with regional economic communities and member States to strengthen Africa's capacity to generate, analyse and disseminate reliable and credible data for different end-users. Therefore the need for harmonised systems of data/information gathering and management at national and sub-regional levels to allow for credibility and comparability between sectors and member States cannot be overemphasised. Lack of reliable statistics is generally recognized as a key impediment to sustainable development in all countries and at all levels in society. Against this backdrop, this meeting has been organised to forge strategic alliances with national Central Statistical Offices (CSOs) to address the identified capacity constraints in the generation, analysis and dissemination of statistical data at various levels.

¹ <http://www.dst.dk/upload/theimportanceofstatisticsforafricasdevelopment.pdf>

III. Scope of Issues

As earlier noted every country or region needs to describe its social, demographic, economic and environmental conditions – this information will create knowledge on society and is a prerequisite for forming opinions and making policy decisions on a sound basis. Reliable, independent and trustworthy information and data on all aspects of society are therefore needed so policy-makers and other stakeholders can make evidence-based planning and policy decisions, researchers can analyze society, and citizens can form opinions and hold governments accountable for their policies. To put it simply, reliable, independent and available information lays the foundation for a democratic society².

Thus the meeting will attempt to address the following questions among others:

- What are the opportunities and challenges of data collection, analysis and dissemination in the sub-region?
- How can CSOs facilitate the harmonization of data measurement and methodologies in Southern Africa?
- How can ECA jointly form a framework of collaboration with CSOs in data generation, analysis and dissemination?

IV. Objectives of the Meeting

The ECA within its broad mandate of support to member States and RECs produces a number of flagship publications both at the continental and sub-regional levels. One of the notable publications at the regional level is the Economic Report on Africa commonly known as the ERA. At the sub-regional level in Southern Africa the ECA-SA produces the regional Human Development Report (HDR) for Southern Africa, the Economic and Social Conditions Report for Southern Africa, the Economic Report for Southern Africa, etc. These publications at the sub-regional level are done within the framework of the multi-year programme (MYP) of collaboration with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as a key aspect of ECA-SA analytical and policy work. Thus the project entails collection of statistical data for analytical purposes. In preparing these reports, the ECA-SA in collaboration with SADC employs strategies that lend themselves to the process of involving key stakeholders and other development partners to allow for broad inputs.

It is against this background that the ECA-SA will be convening an ad hoc expert group meeting whose purpose is to discuss modalities with regional Central Statistical Offices (CSOs) on forging cooperation including identification of focal points who will work with the ECA-SA office. More specifically, the meeting sets to achieve the following objective: to establish how CSOs in the sub-region can partner with ECA-SA in the collection, analysis and dissemination of data to ensure data comparability and credibility.

It is envisaged that the long-term relationship between the ECA-SA and the CSOs arising from this initiative will subsequently help the ECA-SA to have access to useful, reliable and comparable statistical data from member States on a sustainable basis.

² <http://www.dst.dk/upload/theimportanceofstatisticsforafricasdevelopment.pdf>

V. Expected Outcomes

- A regional platform for sharing information and statistics on key development issues to be initiated;
- Harmonization of production and use of statistics at the sub-regional level;
- Lay a foundation for building of a regional database
- Framework for collaboration between ECA-SA and CSOs for the development of statistical information systems at national, sub regional and regional levels to be put in place.

VI. Participants

The experts will be primarily drawn from the central statistical offices and government departments responsible for the production of statistics and data. An official from the African Centre of Statistics from ECA Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia will be invited as well. These experts are mostly professionals working on data production, management, analysis and dissemination.

VII. Date and Venue

The meeting will take place from 3 to 4 December, 2009 at Tum's George Hotel, in Manzini, Swaziland.

VIII. Administrative Arrangements

ECA-SA will cover the costs of a round trip economy class air ticket and DSA for experts coming from outside Swaziland to cater for accommodation and meals at the prevailing United Nations rate for the meeting days.

Ground logistics, including transportation to and from hotels will be provided. It will be the responsibility of participants to organize their entry visas prior to their travel and please note that ECA does not reimburse visa fees.

The working language of the meeting will be English throughout the sessions.

IX. Contacts

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