Ninth Meeting of Statistical Commission for Africa

Unleashing the potential of African innovation in statistical development

EMBRACE NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR DIGITAL COLLECTION METHODS FOR TIMELY AND RELEVANT STATISTICS

Ethiopia's Deputy Prime Minister Temesgen Tiruneh

HIGHLIGHTS

Addis Ababa, 30 October 2024 (ECA) – Ethiopia's Deputy Prime Minister, Temesgen Tiruneh has challenged African policy makers to build robust data and statistical systems that support development.

Officially opening the 9th Statistical Commission this week, Mr. Tiruneh decried traditional statistical approaches, saying they were no longer relevant to meet new demands for data and statistics. Instead, he stated, "Africa must embrace new technologies and innovation in digital collection methods to ensure statistics are timely and relevant."

"The world is changing, and Africa must be ready to ensure it participates in the digital economy," said Mr. Tiruneh, noting that using geospatial data in decision-making was "critical to helping pinpoint where development was happening or lacking thereof."

For his part, ECA African Centre for Statistics (ACS) Director, Oliver Chinganya said Africa was facing huge economic development challenges that demanded innovative solutions, and modern statistical systems were key, in this regard.

Speaking on behalf of the ECA Executive Secretary, Claver Gatete, Mr. Chinganya said, "Africa must invest in the transformation and modernization of statistical

Message from
OLIVER CHINGANYA
Director, African Center for Statistics

Dear Colleagues,

It was a great pleasure to welcome you all to Addis Ababa and to see you during our meetings. I want to extend my sincere gratitude to the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for their exceptional hospitality. The splendid dinner and traditional music at the Ethiopian Skylight Hotel last night were genuinely memorable. They added a special touch to our gathering.

As we reach the conclusion of our events, I want to express my heartfelt thanks for your active engagement in the **Ninth Meeting of the Statistical Commission for Africa, the Fourth Global Expert Forum for Producers and Users of Disaster-related Statistics, and the Tenth Session of the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Africa (UN-GGIM: Africa).** Your insights and contributions have significantly enriched our discussions and have been instrumental in shaping the future of statistical development on our continent.

In addition to these main events, your participation and organization in the numerous side events covering critical areas in statistical development and innovations have been invaluable. I believe, the knowledge shared and the connections made during these sessions have greatly enhanced our efforts to advance statistics across Africa, including integrating statistics and geospatial information.

I wish you safe and pleasant journeys as you return to your home countries. May the collaborations we have fostered and the ideas we have continue to inspire and guide our work in the future. Together, we are making significant strides in strengthening statistical capacity and promoting evidence-based decision-making throughout the continent.

Let us continue to work together towards our shared goals and the betterment of Africa.

Warm regards,

Director, African Centre for Statistics

It is a distinct honour to address you today at this important gathering of the Statistical Commission for Africa and I bring you warm greetings from the People and Government of Malawi.

First, allow me to express my gratitude to the Government of Ethiopia for hosting this significant event.

The role this Economic Commission (UNECA) plays in strengthening our continent's data ecosystem cannot be overstated. As Secretary to the President and Cabinet, I have experienced how robust statistical data informs the decisions as Governments we undertake and the policies we formulate to shape the future of our nations from the micro to macro level. As I reflect on our theme "Unleashing the

SPEECH BY MS. COLLEEN ZAMBA AT THE OPENING OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION FOR AFRICA (STATCOM-AFRICA)

Potential of African Innovation in Statistical Development" Let me share with you a story on the impact of data at the micro level.

"Once upon a time, once upon a time, there was a girl in the village. This girl grew up watching her father meticulously track the rains each season. Every year, she would watch her father write down the exact day the first rains fell. She would watch her father write down the date the last rains would fall. This girl did not understand why her father would be keeping a record of when the rain would fall and end every year. Many villagers would laugh at him as to why he would be writing down the beginning of the rainy season and the end. The surprise to many is season after season the girl's father would achieve better harvests than most of the villagers. He had a record such a year rains fell on 17 October, such a year on 19th and so on and so on... It is not until later in life when that girl who is now standing here today and speaking to you realised that the father wrote down the rain pattern to predict the best times to plant and harvest, leading to better yields year after year."

That early exposure to data-driven decision-making through a notebook should propel our interest, investment and highlight the integral role data plays in policy making decisions from central government and affiliated institutions.

systems to accelerate sustainable development and economic growth," he told delegates at the Statistical Commission being held under the theme, 'Unleashing the potential of African innovation in statistical Development'.

"The SDGs demand new data acquisition and integration approaches to improve the quality timeliness and disaggregation of data. Any national SDG implementation would be suboptimal without strategies and frameworks to integrate geospatial information into the measuring and reporting processes," he added.

The ECA has developed and approved a Roadmap for African countries to transform and modernize their data and statistical systems. African countries have made commendable progress in adopting the 2008 System of National Accounts, and a majority of countries have adopted or are in the process of adopting the SNA, which, according to Chinganya, "demonstrates a commitment to improving the quality and relevance of statistics, which are vital for policy making."

He stressed that quality data and statistics were key in enhancing Africa's economic integration and the ability of the continent to formulate evidence-based trade, contributing to inclusive growth under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) framework.

Fitsum Assefa Adela, Minister of Planning and Development, Ethiopia mentioned that Ethiopia has embarked on a digital transformation

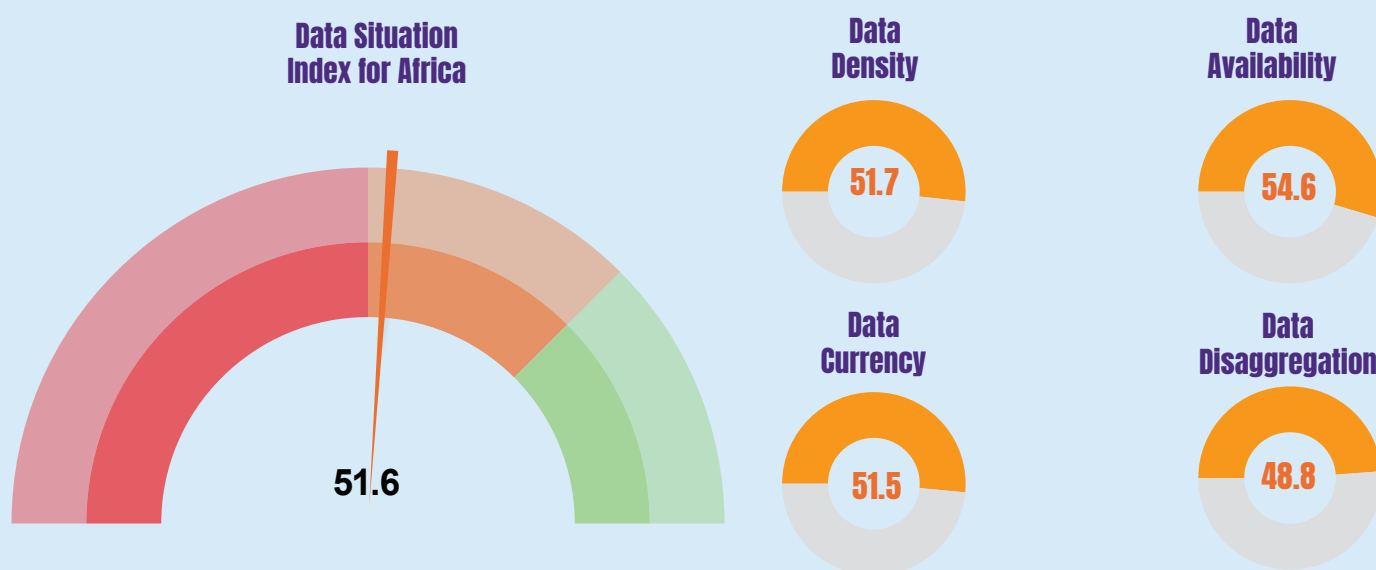geared towards improving data quality, enhancing accessibility and strengthening data systems.

Colleen Zamba, Secretary to the President and Cabinet in Malawi said accurate and reliable data was the foundation of effective governance and management in Africa.

"Without strong data, we are navigating in the dark; we must drive proactive sustainable growth to achieve reliable predictive analysis and response to the changing world," she said.

Ms. Zamba also stressed the need to discuss Africa's poor collection and retention of data and find effective ways to collect and disseminate data.

Maroale Chauke, Chair of the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Africa, underscored the importance of geospatial information underlining that many SDG indicators require geospatial data "because it can be analyzed and visualized spatially."

"We can all acknowledge that linking people, business and the economy to a place, to a geographic location, can result in a fuller understanding of social, economic and environmental issues," said Ms. Chuke, explaining that the integration of statistical and geospatial information should be seen in the context of a broader integration of data from various sources, reflecting today's data-driven society.

Data Situation Index for Africa

51.6

Data Density

51.7

Data Availability

54.6

Data Currency

51.5

Data Disaggregation

48.8

DATA SITUATION INDEX (DSI)

The African Centre for Statistics of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has recently developed a Data Situation Index (DSI), an innovative tool to assess the status of the SDGs data landscape in Africa and encourage countries to enhance data production and dissemination for more accurate measurement of the SDGs progress. The index encompasses four dimensions that collectively influence data landscape for SDGs namely: data availability, data currency, data disaggregation and data density. The development of the index has been a participatory process benefiting from internal consultations and reviews to ensure robustness and statistical soundness of the methodology.

Africa achieved a score of 51.6 out of 100 on the DSI, indicating a pressing need to improve the production and dissemination of SDGs data. The index also revealed significant disparities among countries in the continent where the highest stands at 59.5 and the lowest scored 38.0.

The Index was presented to member states and partners at a side event during the 9th session of the Statistical Commission for Africa. The recommendation emphasized the need for ECA to continue producing the index to support evidence-based statistical development interventions.

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FOURTH GLOBAL EXPERT FORUM OF PRODUCERS AND USERS OF DISASTER-RELATED STATISTICS CONCLUDES

The Fourth Global Experts Forum of Producers and Users of Disaster-Related Statistics, held from October 28 to 30, 2024, concluded with a call to action from Oliver Chinganya, Director of the African Centre for Statistics. Reflecting on three days of valuable discussions, he emphasized the collective commitment to enhancing disaster-related statistics.

Participants from diverse backgrounds tackled challenges in data collection and highlighted the potential of effective disaster data management to improve global disaster response. Sessions focused on the need for standardized methodologies and the integration of local knowledge, showcasing case studies that demonstrate how robust statistics can save lives and foster resilient communities.

Mr. Chinganya expressed gratitude to all speakers and participants, urging them to carry forward the insights gained. He encouraged continued advocacy for better data practices and collaboration. The forum also announced five side events scheduled for October 31 to November 1, inviting all to engage further in these crucial discussions.

The success of the Forum hinges on the strong collaboration and support from partners including African Center for Statistics (ACS) and Climate Change, Food Security and Natural Resources Division (CFND) of ECA, African Union Commission (AUC), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and UN regional commissions: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean (ECLAC).

The New Data Ecosystem: Changing Dynamics, Evolving Actors

We are living in a world undergoing rapid transformation, and this is especially true for the data ecosystem. Over the course of my Career, whether serving as Principal Secretary in Ministry of Finance in Malawi or advising global development initiatives, I have seen this shift up close.

In the past, national statistical offices and public institutions were the primary producers of data and in Africa this still remains the case. Today, however, we operate in a far more interconnected environment where the private sector, civil society, and academic institutions play significant roles in the collection and collating of data. Advancements in technology, such as artificial intelligence and big data, have also changed how we should collect, analyse and use data. Big Data, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are revolutionizing virtually every sector of the economy but that along with the potential economic benefits these same capabilities also confront- winner takes all economics and emergence of a new factor of production machine knowledge capital, increased concentration of wealth and integrity of the democratic process, national security risks and strategic rivalries in geopolitics.

Data governance is the most important public policy issue because whoever controls data controls who and what interacts with it.

These changes are not just superficial, they fundamentally alter how we work. As statisticians and policymakers, we must ask ourselves: How do we ensure our data systems remain credible and adaptable? How do we engage these new actors while safeguarding the integrity of our statistics?

The answers, I believe, lie in our ability to adapt while holding fast to the core principles that underpin our work collaboration, ethics and trust. We must embrace this new ecosystem by fostering stronger partnerships across sectors, ensuring that technological innovations are harnessed responsibly, and safeguarding the values of transparency and accountability.

Responding to the Demands of a Changing World

Ladies and gentlemen, I have seen firsthand that accurate and reliable data is the foundation of effective governance and development. Whether managing national budgets in Malawi or advising on global development goals, one truth remains constant: without strong data systems, we are navigating in the dark.

Statisticians hold a crucial role in Africa's transformation, but that role has evolved. It's no longer about gathering data alone. Today, it's about translating vast amounts of information into meaningful actions. Our work has shifted from merely describing the present to predicting the future and driving proactive, sustainable growth across the continent.

However, to achieve reliable predictive analysis and effectively respond to demands of the changing world we need to discuss the elephant in the room, which is Africa's poor collection and retention of data.

Africa needs to find effective solutions to collect data from the micro level to the macro level to drive effective policy decisions. In computer science big data, there is an acronym termed "GIGO" which means Garbage in Garbage out. In order for Africa to avoid or reduce any slippages in policy, making decisions, the collection and retention of data has to improve and the first step to achieving this is digitalisation.

Harnessing Technology and AI: The Path Forward

Technology can drastically enhance efficiency and broaden the scope of what we can achieve.

In the realm of statistics, artificial intelligence and big data hold immense potential to transform how we tackle complex issues from poverty and inequality to environmental sustainability. These tools were previously out of reach.

However, as we embrace these advancements, we must remain vigilant about the ethical challenges they pose. Data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the misuse of information are critical concerns. Our role as statisticians and policymakers is not just to adopt new technologies but also to ensure they are used responsibly. This requires building regulatory frameworks that protect individual privacy, ensuring transparency and accountability in AI systems, and fostering a data ecosystem that upholds ethical standards.

The Role of Partnerships in a Data-Driven Africa

Whether coordinating national economic policies or advising on global development, success has always been rooted in collaboration. This is especially true in the field of statistics, where no single institution can meet today's data demands independently.

The private sector, with its vast data sources and technological expertise, can greatly enhance our understanding of economic and social trends. Academia, through research and innovation, provides new methodologies to ensure our data systems remain rigorous. Meanwhile, national statistical offices are uniquely positioned to coordinate these efforts, aligning them with national development priorities.

Through collaborative research, data-sharing agreements, and joint capacity-building, we can build data systems that are robust, inclusive, and forward-looking. Only by working together can we navigate today's challenges and unlock the full potential of a data-driven Africa.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

In closing, I remind you that we stand here on behalf of the 1.5 billion African of which 60% are 25 years or younger to create robust data systems which will assist us to respond to their needs.

We stand here on behalf of the 282 million Africans who are malnourished yet Africa holds 65% of the world's uncultivatable land.

We stand here today knowing that our ability to collect effective and reliable data, and embrace innovation with collaboration will greatly assist in spurring Africa's growth, development and response to the challenges the continent faces.

I urge each of you statisticians, policymakers, private sector leaders and academics to join forces in this mission. Together, we can build the data systems Africa needs to thrive in the 21st century.

Thank you for your attention.

PICTURES GALLERY