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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

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of African Planners, Statisticians and  
Demographers

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**REVIEW OF A STRATEGY FOR STATISTICAL DEVELOPMENT  
IN AFRICA IN THE 1990s**

1. In the recent past, and in particular in the context of the programme of structural adjustment and reforms, there has been increased awareness of the need to improve and strengthen information systems in African countries. It was in recognition of the importance of information flows that in 1988 the Fifth Session of the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers (PSD) requested ECA to undertake an assessment of the national statistical capacity of all African countries. Such comprehensive exercise was deemed necessary in order to determine whether sufficient progress had been made in the 1980s to satisfy Africa's data needs, and whether adequate national statistical infrastructure and capacities had been put in place.

2. The results of the 32 country assessments were presented to the Sixth Session of PSD (E/ECA/PSD.6/16). The conclusion of the exercise was that despite different legal and administrative set-ups, "there is no area which has no problem".

3. It should be recalled that the upshot of that assessment was the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s, drawn up by the Sixth Session of PSD and adopted by the Twenty-fifth session of the Commission/Sixteenth meeting of African ministers responsible for economic planning and development, in May 1990. In recognition of the strategic role of qualitative analysis for improving decision-making for sustainable development, the Plan of Action enunciated a number of principles and objectives and made recommendations to governments-member States of ECA and to International Organizations. One recommendation was that "ECA should take the initiative to convene a working group meeting to further review and elaborate on the principles, objectives and recommendations of the Plan of Action and formulate detailed strategies for its implementation"

4. The Modus operandi from plan to action is mapped out in A Strategy for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s. First, a draft strategy was prepared by Dr. K.T. de Graft-Johnson, ECA Consultant. This draft was, as recommended by the Plan of Action, presented to a Working Group meeting on the Implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s which took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 16-20 July 1991. It was attended by representatives of 20 countries, the academic as well as bilateral and multilateral donor community and international organizations. After a thorough review, the Working Group adopted the strategy. The proceedings of that meeting are contained in the Report of the Working Group (ECA/STAT-SDPA/WGM.1/91/1).

5. The strategy calls on national decision-makers, the international community and those with responsibility for managing statistical work to help rehabilitate and improve national

capabilities and statistical systems in African countries. As a background to such action, the strategy reviews African statistical development during the period 1960-1989 and, in particular, in 1990. Major challenges in the 1990s are highlighted. These include the competition between internal and external demand for data, the choice of a minimum core of subjects for national statistical services (NSSs), the management of statistical offices, formulation of data dissemination policy, marketing of statistical outputs, determination of priorities, preparation of work programmes, co-ordination, increased involvement of women in statistical development, and the need for methods and standards units in NSSs.

6. Not only does the strategy outline the urgent tasks that could be undertaken at the national, subregional, regional and global levels to revitalize African statistics, it also proposes ways of implementing its various elements. While the need for joint effort in and among countries, with support from the international community, was the driving force in formulating the strategy, regard was taken of the differing circumstances among these countries: thus the strategy provides a framework within which individual countries could formulate much more specific and detailed priorities for the development of statistics in accordance with their national needs.

7. The strategy spells out possible actions which could be taken at the national, subregional and regional as well as global levels. National level actions include a needs assessment or programme review and strategy development as a first step; preparation of statistical development plans; development of annual or biennial work programme budgets; data processing; data analysis; data storage, retrieval and dissemination and the creation of public awareness for statistics. Actions at the regional and subregional level are: the development of concepts, definitions and classifications suited to the African region; statistical training and research; advisory services; regional information system; preparation of guidelines in respect of national statistical development plans; preparation and adoption of handbooks and manuals; co-ordination of technical co-operation; etc. Global level actions proposed include: umbrella programmes and networking arrangements; development of global standards, handbooks and manuals; provision of interregional advisory services and co-ordination of technical co-operation.

8. The strategy envisages the need for a smooth transition from the current state of statistical development in a country to the enhanced level it proposes. To that end, and until its implementation in any country, efforts should be made to continue the activities of the NSS at least at the current level, while at the same time avoiding to commit the NSS to any long term activity

before the results of the proposed needs assessment team are known. Transition arrangements for the implementation of the strategy would require actions to be taken at the national, subregional, regional and global levels.

9. The urgent task is to redress the present state of African statistics, rehabilitate and develop it. It is a challenge: the strategy, a way forward.

10. The present session of the Joint conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers is invited to consider and approve the proposed Strategy for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s in the light of the report of the Nairobi Working Group meeting (Document E/ECA/PSD.7/23) and to advise the ECA Conference of Ministers on ways and means of implementing the Strategy.