

African Statistical Development: A Review and the Road Ahead In The New  
Millennium

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Introduction

1. The Sixties started with a vision of a new Africa free of colonialism. The torch of freedom began in 1957 with Ghana followed by several others in the 1960s, including Nigeria the most populous African country. With independence the need was felt for better statistics which were - comprehensive, of high quality, timely etc, as nationalistic governments wanted information to enable them take policy decisions in areas they felt had been neglected by the colonial powers or areas they put greater emphasis on, such as education and industrialisation. Newly independent countries felt that they needed to catch up with the developed world.

2. At independence, and for some time after, many countries relied on their former colonial masters for their top statistical personnel. The need for training of local statisticians became evident and efforts were made in that regard through local institutions and training abroad. During these initial years many African countries gave good support to national statistical services (NSSs) and statistical data were produced in a more or less timely fashion. Some countries such as Ghana and others undertook modern population censuses even in the sixties.

3. Beginning from the late seventies and throughout the eighties many African countries experienced economic hardships due, inter-alia, to high inflation, and deterioration in the terms of trade of their exports and imports. The deteriorating economic situation had a great impact on government bureaucracies including national statistical services (NSSs). Structural adjustment programmes and the attendant reductions in government budget allocations and public sector staff had a toll. Qualified statistical staff moved to the private and quasi-government sectors for better conditions of service because high inflation caused reductions in real income and remuneration.

The Nineties

4. These developments led to the formulation in 1990 of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for statistical development at the sixth session of the joint Conference of African Planners,

Statisticians and Demographers. The Plan was adopted in May 1990 by the ECA Conference of Ministers responsible for Economic Development and Planning.

5. A strategy for implementation of the Plan of Action was initiated in 1992 and provided a framework for rehabilitating and revitalizing African statistics. The main aims were to set up mechanisms for statistical networks to improve African statistics and through them to use scarce national and international resources more effectively. The umbrella organization for implementing the strategy has been the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development (CASD). CASD had four subcommittees organized around key issues in improving statistics: (i) organisation and management of NSSs, (ii) training, (iii) research, methods and standards, and (iv) data processing.

What results did CASD and its subcommittees achieve? I would say mixed.

There have been some useful outputs from the CASD and its subcommittees (as discussed in detail last week):-

- (i) Documentation for conducting needs assessments for NSS;
- (ii) Lists of training centres and possible sources of finance etc.

Some of the negative aspects included the meetings that never took place and the several outputs that did not get produced.

Currently CASD operates with time limited task forces. This was discussed last week so all of you are more knowledgeable about their work and effectiveness than I am.

#### 6. The current situation

So what is the current status of African statistics?

Let us take a look at a few areas of statistics. Are African countries producing timely and quality data, at least for the major areas of statistics? Table 1 shows the availability of data submitted by African countries to the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). The latest year provided is shown.

**TABLE 1**  
**Recency of Data Submitted to the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)**

(1)	Countries (2)	International Commodity Trade Data (latest year) (3)	Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (latest year) (4)
1	Algeria	1997	1994
2	Angola	1991	1990
3	Benin	1989	1991
4	Botswana	*	1996
5	Burkina Faso	1989	1986
6	Burundi	1989	1992
7	Cameroon	1996	1990
8	Cape Verde	1994	1989
9	Central African Republic	1996	1992
10	Chad	1995	1994
11	Comoros	1989	-
12	Congo	1995	1992
13	Cote d'Ivoire	1996	1993
14	Demo. Rep. of Congo	1989	1992
15	Djibouti	1992	1981
16	Egypt	1997	1991
17	Equatorial Guinea	1989	1991
18	Eritrea	-	-
19	Ethiopia	1995	1992
20	Gabon	1996	1992
21	Gambia	1988	1993
22	Ghana	1992	1992
23	Guinea	1989	-
24	Guinea Bissau	1989	1992

TABLE I (Cont.)  
Recency of Data Submitted to the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)

(1)	Countries (2)	International Commodity Trade Data (latest year) (3)	Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (latest year) (4)
25	Kenya	1997	1995
26	Lesotho	*	1996
27	Liberia	1989	1989
28	Libya	1991	1985
29	Madagascar	1997	1992
30	Malawi	1995	1996
31	Mali	1990	1992
32	Mauritania	1989	1992
33	Mauritius	1997	1997
34	Morocco	1997	1997
35	Mozambique	1996	1992
36	Namibia	*	1996
37	Niger	1989	1990
38	Nigeria	1991	1994
39	Rwanda	1989	1992
40	Sao Tome & Principle	1989	1988
41	Senegal	1995	1997
42	Seychelles	1996	1997
43	Sierra leone	1989	1990

**TABLE 1(Cont.)**  
**Recency of Data Submitted to the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)**

(1)	Countries (2)	International Commodity Trade Data (Latest year) (3)	Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Latest year) (4)
44	Somalia	1989	1987
45	South Africa	1996*	1997
46	Sudan	1996	1990
47	Swaziland	*	1994
48	Togo	1991	1986
49	Tunisia	1997	1996
50	Uganda	1989	1995
51	United Republic of Tanzania	1997	1994
52	Zambia	1995	1991
53	Zimbabwe	1995	1996

\* These countries data are included in South Africa

7. These tables tell a big story - I will only make brief remarks regarding them and leave the rest for discussion of the meeting throughout this week. The tables clearly indicate that many African countries have not reported recent data to UNSD and probably to other international organisations. Countries have probably not produced the data. I am aware of the fact that if the data has not been sent to UNSD it does not mean that it is not available in the country - it may well be there! Having a country's data at an international organisation is mutually beneficial since all types of users go to these organisations to obtain information

- (i) The third column is commodity trade data of exports and imports. Nearly a third (17 out of 53) have data only up to 1989. Only 8 countries have sent 1997 and none has sent 1998 data.
- (ii) Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is in the fourth column. Here only 5 out of 53 have 1997 data and none have 1998. Eight countries have data earlier than 1990.
- (iii) For demographic and social data, another table is presented - Table 2. The picture is no better and may even be worse in this sector. The table lists key indicators for monitoring the major recommendations of the recent global conferences. Relatively recent data (1994 onwards) is available only for total population, access to safe water and sanitation but for important indicators like life expectancy at birth, infant and child mortality, and unemployment there is hardly any data beyond 1990.

**Table 2**  
**Availability and recency of data at the international level**  
**for Selected Indicators in the Minimum National Social Data Set (MNSDS)<sup>1</sup>**

Indicator	Availability and recency of data	Number of countries					
		Total	Africa	Amer's	Asia	Europe	Oceania
	Total	195	54	39	48	42	12
Total population	With data	186	51	37	45	41	12
	1995 or later	139	27	31	35	38	8
	1990-1994	37	18	5	9	3	2
	1985-1989	10	6	1	1	0	2
	No recent data	9	3	2	3	1	0
Population by sex and age	With data	158	36	35	38	40	9
	1995 or later	72	10	17	18	26	1
	1990-1994	62	19	14	13	13	3
	1985-1989	24	7	4	7	1	5
	No recent data	37	18	4	10	2	3
Life expectancy at birth	With data	104	10	24	28	37	5
	1995 or later	37	3	9	6	19	0
	1990-1994	45	3	10	13	15	4
	1985-1989	22	4	5	9	3	1
	No recent data	91	44	15	20	5	7
Infant mortality rate	With data	93	6	21	23	38	5
	1995 or later	57	1	10	9	34	3
	1990-1994	27	3	9	10	4	1
	1985-1989	9	2	2	4	0	1
	No recent data	102	48	18	25	4	7

<sup>1</sup> This table is taken from E/CN.3/1999/14. It was based mainly on published international sources (specifically, *Compendium of Human Settlements Statistics 1995*, *Demographic Yearbook 1996*, *Population and Vital Statistics Report: Data available as of 1 April 1998*, *World Population Monitoring 1998*, and *Yearbook of Labour Statistics 1997*); and files provided by the International Labour Office, World Health Organization and the Economic Statistics Branch of the United Nations Statistics Division from their respective databases. Given that one of the primary goals for the compilation was to identify gaps and areas requiring greater attention by national and international statistical systems, smoothed, model-based or other estimated data and projections prepared by international organizations were purposely excluded.

Indicator	Availability and recency of data	Number of countries					
		Total	Africa	Amer's	Asia	Europe	Oceania
Child mortality rate	<b>With data</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>5</b>
	1995 or later	31	2	2	6	20	1
	1990-1994	52	3	19	12	16	2
	1985-1989	13	3	4	4	0	2
	<b>No recent data</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Maternal mortality ratio	<b>With data</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>2</b>
	1995 or later	27	0	4	5	18	0
	1990-1994	42	2	14	8	16	2
	1985-1989	9	2	4	2	1	0
	<b>No recent data</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>
Contraceptive prevalence, women in union	<b>With data</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>
	1995 or later	24	13	6	4	1	0
	1990-1994	75	21	13	26	13	2
	1985-1989	29	6	10	6	3	4
	<b>No recent data</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>6</b>
Ave. no. of persons per room	<b>With data</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>
	1990-1994	16	2	6	1	6	1
	1980-1989	21	1	5	7	7	1
	<b>No recent data</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>10</b>
	% with access to safe water	<b>With data</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>18</b>
1994-1996		119	39	33	32	9	6
1986-1993		36	13	1	10	9	3
<b>No recent data</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>3</b>
% with access to sanitation		<b>With data</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>32</b>
	1994-1996	111	34	30	33	9	5
	1986-1993	56	17	2	9	23	5
	<b>No recent data</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>
	Per capita GDP	<b>With data</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>36</b>
1995 or later		64	8	14	21	20	1
1990-1994		94	33	22	17	16	6
1985-1989		14	9	3	1	0	1
<b>No recent data</b>		<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>

Indicator	Availability and recency of data	Number of countries					
		Total	Africa	Amer's	Asia	Europe	Oceania
Unemployment rate	<b>With data</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>3</b>
	1995 or later	60	1	16	12	28	3
	1990-1994	27	4	10	5	8	0
	<b>No recent data</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>
Employment-population ratio, ages 15-64	<b>With data</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>2</b>
	1995 or later	55	2	19	11	22	1
	1990-1994	9	0	6	1	1	1
	1985-1989	2	1	1	0	0	0
	<b>No recent data</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>10</b>

#### Some recent initiatives

8. There are new initiatives that could help guide statistical development. The region needs to pay attention to some of these or assess and see how we might get involved or participate.

##### (i) New Forms of Organisation of National Statistical Services

National Statistical Services have traditionally been pure civil service organisations. For some time now some NSSs have adopted a quasi-government type of organisation to allow for better conditions of service. Ghana has had such a system with its own board of directors for some years now and Zambia is another example. Very recently, some NSSs have adopted a private corporation type of arrangement whereby even government will have to buy services and outputs. Cote d'Ivoire has such a system. We are yet to see how this will work out over time. Let us hope that these changes will stem the flow of staff from the NSSs.

##### (ii) General and Special Data Dissemination Standards

Participants will have the opportunity during this meeting to exchange views on the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) General Data Dissemination Standards (GDSS) at the subcommittee on statistics.

As several among you are aware, the GDSS is part of a wider programme undertaken by the IMF to assist members in improving their statistical systems and the quality of their data. It is expected to be a guide in the dissemination to the public of comprehensive, timely, accessible, and reliable economic, financial, and socio-demographic data. In addition to the GDSS, which applies to all Fund members, the Fund has also established the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDSS) for members with more advanced statistical systems that have, or plan to have, access to international capital markets.

##### (iii) Indicator Project

Following recent global conferences on education, children, population, gender, social, habitat etc -- there has been an increased demand on NSSs for data to measure progress made since the conferences. The proliferation of demand for data has given rise to an attempt to coordinate and rationalize the data requests to national statistical services and in recent months there has



been a series of meetings organized at the request of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to evaluate the work on indicators and what the next steps should be. Several African Statistical Services, including ECA, have taken part in these activities and Africa should not be left out of the process. UNSD has led the effort in this exercise. Hopefully, these efforts will reduce the burden on countries but will also improve the availability of data.

Table 3

## Use of data Processing Equipment in 1990 Round of Censuses

	<u>Micro computers</u>			
	<u>Stand Alone</u>	<u>Network</u>	<u>Terminal mainframe</u>	<u>OCR/OMR</u>
Africa	27	12	9	0
Asia	7	4	18	13
Europe	7	5	27	15
North America	5	5	12	12
South America	2	2	3	4
Oceania	4	4	8	3
<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b>52</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>47</b>

OCR - Optical Character recognition (Scanners)

OMR - Optical mark reader (imaging)

The use of scanners and imaging to capture large volumes of data instead of the traditional data entry techniques helps in speeding up census and survey data processing.

9. Strategies for the new millennium:

I will now discuss a series of measures which will help improve the currency of data and statistical services altogether:

- 1) Take advantage of the new technologies-particularly Internet and e-mail- to a) receive and send data, and b) use scanners to capture data

Table 3 shows that in the 1990 round of censuses no African country used scanners to capture data. I believe this is changing but the advantages that the technology offers must be capitalized on.

- 2) Train as many statisticians as possible- work on the assumption that you are going to lose staff. Staff mobility is good for the country.
- 3) Publicize your successes and find out the needs of your users- both government and private sector.
- 4) Promote private contributions to your budget- either directly or by paying for data and other services.

- 5) Put pressure on government to improve the service conditions of your staff.
- 6) Prioritize the areas of statistics that you give attention to- it is impossible to tackle all areas.
- 7) Insist that international organisations share data that are supplied by countries to ensure that the burden of data collection and supply by countries is reduced. The data collection exercise of UNSD for international organisations is already a step in that direction.
- 8) Encourage analysis of data already collected in countries by preparing user oriented publications on topics of public interest.
- 9) ECA should intensify its coordinating role in African statistics and encourage sub-regional activities like the census effort for the Southern African Development Corporation(SADC) by UNSD and UNFPA.

In conclusion I have to remind all of us that the need for comprehensive, timely and good quality statistics is greater today than ever before and so we should all put our shoulders to the plough and rekindle the torch of statistical development. Let us ensure that at the click of a mouse or by pressing a button we can get statistics on last week's activities!

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