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The status of statistical development in Africa

INTRODUCTION

Africa and the world have just adopted two very important development agendas: Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want; and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Statistics are a very important element for the implementation of these two development agendas. If high-quality and updated statistics on Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 are available, Africa will be able to monitor and assess progress with these two agendas and embark on sound development planning. There has certainly been significant progress in statistical development over the past few years, in particular with the adoption by African countries of national statistical development strategies that provide a better overview and proper coordination of national statistical systems. Nevertheless, this progress has not yet been sufficient to ensure high-quality statistics in Africa.

At the continental level, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union adopted the African Charter on Statistics and the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in January 2009 and in Kampala (Uganda) in July 2010, respectively, and they provide the reference frameworks for the coordination, production, dissemination and use of high-quality statistics in Africa.

Despite these tools, which exist at both national and continental level, there is very little high-quality data available that could be used to effectively monitor progress with development projects and programmes in Africa.

The purpose of this document is to portray the current situation of statistics in Africa and to highlight both the challenges and future prospects. The document will focus on the five priority areas for statistics in Africa:

- ✓ Civil registration and vital statistics
- ✓ Governance, peace and security
- ✓ National accounts
- ✓ The data revolution
- ✓ The long-term financing of statistical production.

1. CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS

Both the International Bill of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights recognize the right of every individual to an identity and to civil registration. At present, however, millions of Africans still live without a legal identity, and millions have not been registered. This hampers the work of statisticians and demographers who are monitoring indicators of population change (birth rates, mortality, migration rates and so on). A number of initiatives have been taken in the past few years to improve civil registration.

The Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems

This is a joint programme of the African Union Commission (AUC), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank, and is supported by a number of United Nations agencies. Two conferences of African ministers responsible for civil registration have been organized to discuss the issue of civil registration in Africa. The first, on the theme "Toward Improved Civil Status Information for Efficient Public Administration and Generation of Vital Statistics for National Development and MDGs Monitoring in Africa", was held in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in August 2010. The second conference, on the theme "Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Institutional and Human Infrastructure", was held in Durban (South Africa) in September 2012. At both conferences, the ministers made a firm commitment to improve civil registration and vital statistics by implementing the Africa Programme.

Africa Symposium on Statistical Development

Since 2011, the Africa symposiums on statistical development have focused on the development of civil registration and vital statistics. The Africa Symposium on Statistical Development is a discussion forum for the various actors in the African statistical system. The symposiums are organized by Statistics South Africa in collaboration with AUC, the Statistical Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Given the importance of civil registration and vital statistics, and also the success of the Africa Programme, the ministerial conferences and the symposiums on civil registration, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government decided at its January 2013 summit in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) that the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration would be held every two years.

The Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, which is held under the aegis of the African Union, took place in Yamoussoukro (Côte d'Ivoire) on 12 and 13 February 2013 on the theme "Promoting the use of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Support of Good Governance in Africa". At the end of this meeting, the Conference of Ministers proposed that the decade 2015-2024 be declared the African decade of civil registration and

vital statistics. This resolution was to be submitted to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

The secretariat of the Africa Programme, with technical support from the various actors of the African statistical system, has assessed the national systems for civil registration and vital statistics. Vast amounts of resources have been mobilized for the development of civil registration and vital statistics in African countries. Member States have engaged in capacity-building for the local authority officials who are responsible for collecting civil registration data, and the States have certainly started to produce good vital statistics. Nevertheless, despite the efforts made by pan-African organizations (AUC, ECA and the African Development Bank) and United Nations organizations such as UNICEF and UNFPA for the improvement of vital statistics in Africa, there are still difficulties with civil registration and the production of vital statistics.

Statelessness is one of the problems that blights Africa. It causes unprecedented harm to the citizenship status of many Africans who live their lives from birth to death without any form of registration in a civil registry. This situation also has a very negative impact on their children. Despite the widespread nature of this problem, there is a lack of statistics on statelessness.

There are many questions worth exploring in connection with improving civil registration and the generation of vital statistics and addressing statelessness:

1. *Why are there still shortcomings in this area, despite the involvement of development partners in civil registration and vital statistics,?*
2. *How can national Governments and especially local elected officials be mobilized to take ownership of civil registration and vital statistics?*
3. *What can be done to build the capacities of pan-African organizations for civil registration and vital statistics?*
4. *What portion of the national budget should African Governments allocate to civil registration and the production of vital statistics?*
5. *How can an African fund for the acceleration of civil registration and the production of vital statistics be established?*
6. *How can high-quality and updated statistics on statelessness be produced?*
7. *What can be done to strengthen the continental-level secretariat for civil registration and vital statistics?*
8. *What can be done to strengthen coordination and cooperation among the services responsible for civil registration and national statistical offices?*

2. STATISTICS ON GOVERNANCE, PEACE AND SECURITY

In Africa, as throughout the world, good governance, peace and security have increasingly become the cornerstone for inclusive and sustainable economic development at the national level. Good governance is indispensable for the efficient management of national resources and the effective implementation of flagship programmes which are dear to the African continent, in particular Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It is clear that good governance and a non-threatening environment of peace and security are necessary for the management of public affairs, providing better information and guidance for decision makers, ensuring better planning and rational management of public finances and attracting foreign capital.

In modern society, statistics are still the most efficient tool for collecting and understanding data that will be used to make the right decisions. These obvious facts are particularly relevant in Africa, where over time statistics have proved vital for the good governance of both public and private services, for ensuring that their goals are achieved and tasks completed and for measuring current and future requirements to monitor progress towards such goals. In other words, statistical data is clearly important for decision-making, the management of social cohesion and conflict prevention.

Despite these obvious facts, over the past two decades several countries on the continent have continued to have difficulties with producing and disseminating statistical data on governance, peace and security. Most of the existing data for these areas are produced by non-governmental organizations (Transparency International, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Afrobarometer, and so on) and civil society actors. Few actors in the African statistical system produce statistical data on governance, peace and security, and of those who do, some do not have the capacity to analyse the data, despite the importance of these areas.

In order to remedy this situation, AUC, in collaboration with its partners, in particular ECA, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has established the Specialized Technical Group on Governance, Peace and Security, which is one of the 14 working groups established under the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa. This working group, which was established in May 2012, has devised questionnaire modules that are harmonised with surveys on governance, peace and security. Many African States have already used these modules to collect data on these subjects by adding the modules to the household questionnaires in their household surveys. Some African countries can now generate high-quality and updated statistics in the areas of governance, peace and security.

Despite the efforts made by AUC and UNDP to generate high-quality statistics on governance, peace and security in Africa, the statistical output in these areas is generally insufficient.

1. *How can African leaders be informed of the importance of statistics on governance, peace and security?*
2. *How is it possible to accelerate the production of statistics on governance, peace and security in Africa?*
3. *How can adequate resources be mobilized to conduct surveys and produce indicators for governance, peace and security statistics?*
4. *How can leaders be informed that the production of high-quality statistics on governance, peace and security can contribute to maintaining peace and security and to the emergence of good governance in African countries?*

3. NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

National accounts make it possible to use macroeconomic aggregates to evaluate and monitor the macroeconomic and financial situation of any country. The System of National Accounts can be used to evaluate the economic situation of a country and its economic performance over time. National accounts are important because they can be used to clarify the definition, execution and monitoring of national economic and social development policies. The System of National Accounts, 2008 (2008 SNA) is the most recent version, and it offers a more accurate measurement of a country's economic

activity, particularly as it takes into account economic activity in the informal sector. Nevertheless, very few African countries use the SNA 2008. In order to remedy this situation, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union adopted the African Strategy for the Implementation of the 2008 SNA. The goal of the Strategy is to ensure that pan-African organizations (AUC, ECA and the African Development Bank) and regional economic communities mobilize sufficient technical and financial resources for the efficient implementation of the System of National Accounts in all African countries. The Strategy is implemented by the African Group on National Accounts.

With a view to accelerating the implementation of this strategy, a project document for the period 2012-2017 has been prepared. The purpose of the project is to help all African countries to prepare to adopt the 2008 SNA by 2017 through a process of capacity-building, institution-building and methodology development and an advocacy campaign. AUC has also prepared a project document on improving the information technology tools used for national accounts compilation. The reference tool adopted for the compilation of national accounts is ERETES, which is used by African countries for their national accounts, and in particular for implementation of the 2008 SNA. The Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT) has provided a lot of support for francophone African countries using the ERETES tool. AUC, with technical and financial support from the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Research (INSEE) and Eurostat, is now providing assistance to other countries using the ERETES tool to compile their national accounts.

With a view to improving the quality of national accounts in African countries, AUC, in partnership with the African Development Bank and ECA, has assisted countries with the regular updating of the base year for their national accounts. Updating the base year makes it possible to obtain the true values of the main macroeconomic aggregates, and in particular to revalue the gross domestic product.

To facilitate exchanges between the national accounts officials of African countries, the pan-African organizations have organized peer review mechanisms to evaluate the national systems responsible for compiling national accounts. These peer reviews are conducted by the African countries' national accountants.

A study conducted by ECA in 2015 in collaboration with AUC and the African Development Bank has shown that 38 African countries have formulated or are in the process of formulating a plan of action for implementation of the 2008 SNA. Most of these countries have a clear mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of these action plans. A total of 34 African countries have a clear plan for transition to the 2008 SNA: 12 countries have a plan for transition between 2010 and 2014; and 22 countries have a plan for transition between 2015 and 2018.

Despite the preparation of the strategy and the draft document, implementation of the 2008 SNA in African countries is still a very slow process. Quite a few African countries are still using the 1993 SNA or the 1963 SNA. This situation has a very negative impact on the production of national accounts.

1. *How can African leaders come to understand that the implementation of the 2008 SNA is the only way to have high-quality data?*
2. *What can be done to provide African countries with national plans for implementation of 2008 SNA?*

3. *How can African countries be encouraged to use the ERETES tool to compile their national accounts?*
4. *How can national accounts be established as the sole reliable and credible source of data on macroeconomic aggregates in African countries?*
5. *What can be done to ensure that quarterly national accounts are produced by all African countries?*

4. THE DATA REVOLUTION

It is clear from the monitoring of development in Africa over the past few years that there is a lack of reliable data that are comparable in time and space.

For example, one of the major problems encountered by African countries as they make progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals is the lack of high-quality statistics. Africa has scarcely any data on Goal indicators. The African countries and the Commission are therefore obliged to use projections made by United Nations organizations to evaluate progress towards the Goals. These projections do not always reflect the reality in African countries. This lack of data has an impact on the monitoring and evaluation of the various African agendas, such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa and the Minimum Integration Programme.

To remedy this situation, the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda has called in its report for a "data revolution" in the world, and particularly in Africa. Such a data revolution would provide Africa with high-quality and updated data on the various goals and targets of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To avoid any conflict among the agendas or unnecessary duplication, the data revolution in Africa and all of the content should be integrated and fully incorporated into the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa.

The Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, recognizing the importance of statistics for the development of African countries, has adopted two major decisions on the strengthening of high-quality statistical production in Africa. These were the decisions to establish the African Union Institute for Statistics and the Pan-African Statistical Training Centre, which will be based in Tunis (Tunisia) and Yamoussoukro (Côte d'Ivoire), respectively.

The establishment of the African Union Institute for Statistics and the Pan-African Statistical Training Centre will provide a new framework for coordinating and producing high-quality statistics in Africa.

1. *The data revolution in Africa: myth or reality?*
2. *How can the establishment of the African Union Institute for Statistics and the Pan-African Statistical Training Centre contribute to the data revolution in Africa?*
3. *How can the African Union Institute for Statistics become a supranational organ responsible for regulating and coordinating statistical production in Africa?*
4. *Is it possible for the African Union to have a statistical office that is similar to Eurostat in Europe?*
5. *Can the Pan-African Statistical Training Centre contribute to statistical capacity-building in Africa?*

5. THE FINANCING OF STATISTICS

The financing of national statistical systems is a necessary condition for achieving a data revolution in Africa.

One of the major problems faced by African national statistical systems and that hampers the production of high-quality statistics in Africa is the problem of sufficient and sustainable funding. African Governments allocate very few resources for the production of high-quality statistics. This leaves statistical production very dependent on external resources that can dry up from one day to the next, but statistical production should be regarded as a matter of national sovereignty.

Over the past few decades, African countries have devised national strategies for the development of statistics in order to provide efficient funding for national statistical systems. The preparatory work for these strategies included the establishment of formal frameworks for financing the development of statistics in African countries, in particular the financing of population and housing censuses, agricultural censuses, economic censuses, employment surveys, 1-2-3 surveys, household surveys and so on.

It should be noted that these national strategies are often funded by development partners. Funding from partners is often not consistent with a country's statistical programmes, as its priorities do not always coincide with those of its partners. This situation has a negative impact on statistical activity at the country level. Most African Governments recognize the importance of statistics, but allocate very few resources for their development. The directors general of statistics, at their most recent meeting in Libreville, recommended that each African country should allocate 0.15 per cent of its budget to the development of statistics. Sustainable Development Goal 17, adopted at New York in September 2015, is intended to strengthen the world partnership for sustainable development.

1. *How can it be made clear to African leaders that statistics are a public good and a matter of national sovereignty and that their development should be funded largely by the African countries themselves?*
2. *What percentage of the national budget should be allocated to statistical production?*
3. *When will the national funds for statistics development be established, as recommended in the African Charter on Statistics?*
4. *How can the national statistical offices mobilize sufficient resources for the development of statistics?*

CONCLUSION

Much remains to be done with regard to the development of statistics in Africa. In order to evaluate these development programmes, Africa is still using data produced by international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Statistics Division of the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Labour Organization. Most of these data are projections and do not reflect African reality, resulting in an inaccurate evaluation of development programmes.

By accelerating the implementation of the African Charter on Statistics and the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa, by making the African Union Institute for Statistics and the Pan-African Statistical Training Centre

operational, Africa can rise to the statistical challenge at the continental level, producing its own statistics and providing sound monitoring and evaluation and careful planning for the African development agendas.

Finally, to ensure high-quality statistical production in Africa, there is a need for strong advocacy at the national level so that sufficient resources are made available for national capacity-building for the production, analysis and dissemination of statistical data. More specifically, sufficient and sustainable resources must be allocated to support the long-term production of high-quality statistics and also to build capacity in terms of human resources.