



Economic Commission



Advisory Board on

Meeting of the Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa (ABSA)
10-11 May 2004
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Statistics at ECA

A Framework for Action

(Draft)

ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E18

DRAFT REPORT

Introduction

1. The Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa (ABSA) held its first meeting at the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC) in Addis Ababa from 10 to 11 May 2004.

Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by representatives of a number of countries and organizations, namely, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda; and organizations (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa - COMESA, the Centre de suivi écologique -CSE (Senegal) Economic Community of West African States – ECOWAS, Southern African Development Community – SADC, Ecole nationale d'économie et de statistique appliquée (Côte d'Ivoire), East African Statistical Training Centre - EASTC (Tanzania), the Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT), and the African Development Bank (ADB);
3. Observers from the International Labour Office (ILO), Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21 Century-PARIS21, the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD), and the World Bank, also attended the meeting.
4. The full list of participants is attached as Annex IV.

Account of proceedings

Opening ceremony(agenda item 1)

5. The Director of the Economic and Social Policy Division of ECA (ESPD) chaired the opening session and welcomed the participants. The Executive Secretary of the Commission made an opening statement.

Election of officers (agenda item 2)

6. The Board elected the following Bureau:

Chairperson:	South Africa
First Vice-Chairperson:	Congo
Second Vice-Chairperson:	Kenya
Rapporteur:	COMESA

7. The Director invited the newly-appointed chairperson of the Board to preside over the proceedings.

Adoption of the agenda and organizational matters (agenda item 3)

8. The Board approved the draft agenda with an amendment on the time allocated to item 6 relating to the document entitled “Statistics at ECA: A framework for Action”. The agenda is attached as Annex II.

Adoption of the report of the ABSA launching meeting (agenda item 4)

9. The Board examined the report of the ABSA launching meeting held in May 2003. Some questions were raised and comments made on the following points:

- (a) It was pointed out that members from Ghana, Madagascar and Mozambique had not been identified in the report;

- (b) The Secretariat recalled that during the launching meeting the representatives of users from Ghana, Madagascar and Mozambique were not yet known and that ECA had been expected to liaise with the directors of national statistical offices in those three countries for the purpose of identifying the country representatives. The Secretariat confirmed that this had been done;

- (c) The organisation of ABSA meetings in member States on a rotational basis was discussed. Its merit is to provide member States with an opportunity to share their experiences in an operational environment. The Board member from Uganda drew the attention of the participants to the fact that Uganda had offered to host the first meeting of ABSA. Uganda offered to host the next ABSA meeting; and

- (d) It was pointed out that there were typographical errors in the French version which should be corrected.

- 10 The Secretariat took note of the comments and the Board, in approving the report of the ABSA launching meeting, requested the Secretariat to make the corrections.

Executive Secretary’s welcoming address

11. The Executive Secretary of ECA welcomed the participants and dwelt briefly on the background to the establishment of ABSA. He underscored the fact that ECA had not done much in the area of statistical development in Africa in years and reiterated his commitment to revamp statistics at ECA in close collaboration with all stakeholders to support Africa’s statistical development efforts. He also invited the participants to examine the documents drafted by the secretariat and advise on ways of tackling the new challenges the continent in the area of statistics.

In keeping with the spirit of the Marrakech Action Plan on Statistics (MAPS), the establishment of a co-sponsored initiative known as the Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV) was envisaged and would hold its first meeting from 12 - 13 May 2004. One of the expected outcomes would be to formulate the modalities for forging strong partnerships in this area, with an emphasis on capacity building. In conclusion, the Executive Secretary reaffirmed the commitment to statistical development in Africa and to fostering resource mobilization to that end.

12. On behalf the participants, the chairperson of the Board thanked the Executive Secretary for his dedication to this important endeavour in the service of the African statistical community.

A strategic framework for statistical development in Africa: (agenda item 5)

13. The Secretariat presented the document entitled “Statistical Development in Africa: A Strategic Framework”.

14. The members of the Board made several general and specific comments about the framework, notably:

General comments

- a. Statistical development should be seen as a dimension of development policy encompassing poverty reduction strategies;
- b. The National Statistical Offices (NSOs) are involved in around 90 per cent of statistical activities, with sub-regional, regional and international organisations undertaking the remainder;
- c. The framework comprised an impressive but large number of proposals that need to be prioritized;
- d. There was need to draw lessons from the Addis Ababa Plan of Action which was a great initiative but failed when it came to implementation; how best the implementation of that framework could have been realized is an important issue that should be explicitly addressed in the proposed new framework;

The framework

- e. The strategic framework is a good package but needed to be improved in terms of details pertaining to, inter alia, the prioritization of objectives; the road map; coordination with other stakeholders; and modalities of collaboration;

- f. The inventory of initiatives is not complete; indeed for organizations such as ADB, nothing is said on their funding of some of the initiatives listed in the document. Some of the proposals were in favour of considering the framework as a starting point and embarking on an inventory of on-going initiatives, including a comprehensive description of the initiatives, their objectives and time-frame, the beneficiaries, the geographical coverage, and sources of funding;
- g. There is a need to clarify the demarcation between the respective areas of focus of the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and the other data producers that are actively engaged in specific sectors;
- h. There is a need to propose sustainable actions and to take into account the fact that there are things which NSOs may directly influence and those that they cannot influence; so that proposals should be addressed to the right actors;
- i. There is a need for a comprehensive methodological framework that can meet the requirements of the development agenda contained in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the New Partnership on Africa's Development (NEPAD), including the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM); indeed, only a limited and disparate set of indicators exist at this stage, with a high risk of incoherence;
- j. The relevance and timeliness of statistical production is a key factor in the development agenda;
- k. There is a need to keep live databases so that users could access them;
- l. There is a need for an institutional framework for coordinating the various data producers; and indeed, data needs go beyond the NSOs' production;
- m. There is a need for more clarity on "who does what".

Specific Areas

- n. The low participation of African statisticians and organisations in international fora and international technical work has to be addressed and reversed;
- o. Technical assistance to statistical training centres (STCs) should be better defined; the national and subregional levels of training should be included in the framework;
- p. There is a need to boost training opportunities through special sessions targeting students about to graduate;

- q. There is a need to introduce non-marked work into the national accounts; to develop better measurements of women's contribution, the guidebook prepared by the African Centre for Gender and Development (ACGD/ECA) ("Mainstreaming gender in national accounts and national budgets") can serve a useful purpose, alongside the African Gender Index (AGI), also developed by ACGD in support of disaggregated data collection;
- r. There is room for NSOs to take in more of what is being done in areas such as the environment within the framework of NEPAD;

15. The Secretariat thanked all the contributors and assured them that it had taken note of their concerns. Nevertheless, it made the following remarks:

- a. The framework is a reference framework as stated at the second meeting of the Committee on Development Information (CODI II) which decided to discontinue plans of action at the regional level;
- b. It should be made clear that we are at the starting point of a process and it is obvious that such processes begin with an inventory of the existing and envisaged initiatives. The Secretariat does not consider that the inventory can be comprehensive at this stage. Indeed, it was expected that, before coming to the first meeting of the Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV), partners would consolidate the inventory of their projects and programmes on statistical development in Africa, including sources of funding, and that on that basis, the ECA Secretariat could make a synthesis at the national, subregional and regional levels in order to improve the strategic framework;
- c. The debate on "who is doing what" and on prioritization cannot, of course take place until such a time as stakeholders will be in a position to inform all of us, during the FASDEV meeting, on their respective statistical projects and programmes in Africa;
- d. Regarding the specific issue on gender, the secretariat informed the Board that ECA has a kind of decentralized system where other divisions have statistical initiatives such as the above-mentioned AGI and the project on "Measuring progress towards Good Governance in Africa" which is managed by the Development Policy Management Division (DPMD). The Secretariat will take the necessary steps to disseminate all the tools emanating from such projects in order to make them operational at the country level;
- e. There is need to create a network of the STCs to overcome the huge divide between the STCs for French-speaking countries and English-speaking countries.

16. Finally, the Board adopted a set of recommendations (1 to 9) that are attached as Annex 1.

Statistics at ECA: A framework for action (agenda item 6)

17. The Secretariat presented the document entitled “Statistics at ECA: A Framework for Action”. The document was made available to the Board members prior to the meeting.

18. The participants commended ECA for the quality of the document and the revitalization of statistics at ECA. They also raised concerns about the following issues:

General comments

- a. The nomadism of the statistical function at ECA is worrisome and there is need to streamline the institutional framework; to re-establish a statistics division, and hire the right number of people with the right skills-mix to implement the proposed work programme;
- b. There is a need to have a data hub at ECA instead of having a situation where the data on Africa comes from places like Washington and Pennsylvania University; some participants would prefer to see ECA assisting countries to develop their own databases and to disseminate their data; others thought that it would be a good idea to have a preliminary inventory of what already exists; whatever the final option, data quality should be adequately addressed;
- c. The expectation is that there will be greater statistical coordination and advocacy on the part of ECA which has played a big role in this area in the past; advocacy work should issue clear signals, and identify specific targets and time frames;
- d. There is need to forge partnerships with other subregional and regional organizations in Africa, given the scarcity of resources and also in order to avoid duplication; ECA should organize preparatory meetings prior to the big international statistical events and fora;
- e. ECA’s role in methodological issues should be enhanced: especially in the terms of standards for African countries;
- f. There is a need to better anchor the programme in the Marrakech Action Plan on Statistics (MAPS) and for countries to monitor the MDGs and PRPSs. MDG and PRSP indicators should be linked to the whole statistical system. There is a model of a master plan which could be used for that purpose;

Specific comments

- g. Countries' expectations in terms of technical assistance from ECA are high;
- h. Once again, statistical activities are essentially carried out at the national level, which calls for the empowerment of national statistical systems (NSSs) rather than subregional and regional statistical systems;
- i. A time-frame should be defined for the proposed work programme, in view of the human and financial resources considerations;
- j. The bias towards economic statisticians in the proposed recruitment programme to the detriment of social statisticians should be watched;

Information provided by some organizations

- k. PARIS 21 recalled its role in terms of “helping to work together”, informed the Board on the ongoing work done with the Luxembourg group on statistical harmonization, and also offered to support the proposed Regional Knowledge and Support centre (REKSA);
- l. ADB briefed the Board about the partnerships forged with various institutions within the framework of ICP-AFRICA, which is a framework for statistical capacity-building without any limitations on the subject-areas; the approach being to establish an inventory, identify the gaps and intervene singly or in concert with other institutions;
- m. AFRISTAT briefed the Board on some of its ongoing projects such as its role in assisting NSOs of its member States to set up websites, the second generation of live databases, and projects on the improvement of the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS);
- n. The STCs commended ECA for its past active involvement in the establishment of some STCs in Africa; they also raised their concerns in regard to the funding of specific training programmes for trainers in the countries concerned, networking among them, and support to methodological frameworks. Statistical training programmes should be revised in order to extend their coverage to issues such as official statistics, management of national statistical systems, and the new development agenda.

19. The Secretariat thanked all the contributors and gave the following clarifications:
- a. The institutional framework will be examined by ECA top management;
 - b. It should be borne in mind that ECA's mandate is related to advocacy, consensus building on policy issues, and technical assistance;
 - c. It is important to discuss advocacy purposes during ABSA meetings because ABSA resolutions are examined by the Committee on Development Information (CODI) and then by ECA Conference of Ministers;
 - d. The secretariat will take into account most of the very useful comments.
20. Finally, the Board adopted a set of recommendations (10 to 20) that are attached as Annex 1.

Work programme 2004-2005 (agenda item 7)

21. The Secretariat presented the work programme of the statistics team in the Economic and Social Policy Division (ESPD).
22. The Board reiterated some of the comments made on item 6.
23. Emphasis was particularly put on the need to be realistic in the implementation of the work programme in view of the scarcity of resources available at ECA. The work programme should be seen as a variable-geometry programme. Some prioritization should be done, and for its implementation, ECA should work out partnership arrangements, taking stock of the various experiences and the comparative advantage of each partner. Regarding national accounts, for instance, seven pilot studies are being conducted by ADB.
24. The need for ECA to support activities related to data and best practices dissemination was stressed. This would strengthen the ongoing efforts of AFRISTAT and ECOWAS to provide Internet facilities and websites to the NSOs of their member States.
25. The Secretariat thanked all the contributors and took note of the recommendations made.

Information society and ICTs indicators (agenda item 8)

26. The representative of the Development Information Services Division (DISD) made a presentation on "Information Society Statistics" where emphasis was put on the emerging statistical activities and the key challenges in information society statistics, namely, the increasing complexity of information and communication technologies (ICTs), identifying

the right indicators; and the sustainability of data collection. DISD attaches a great deal of importance to monitoring ICTs for development and the e-measurement dimensions (demand-side, supply-side and ICT usage). The Division also explained the Commission's role in the Information Society Statistics framework and presented the SCAN-ICT project comprising an organizational framework, methodology, data collection and processing, results dissemination and utilization. Among the questions raised are those pertaining to the readiness of African NSOs to collect such kinds of data; the coordination of the data collection process among the various components of the national statistical systems; and the training aspects;

27. In the view of some participants, the Information Society Statistics framework does not match the context of African countries, which are characterized by a lack of minimum infrastructures. It seemed to them that some essential steps are being overlooked, and it may prove difficult for the NSOs to collect this kind of data in their environment of lack of material and financial resources.
28. DISD representatives indicated that this data are already collected by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in all countries without the involvement of the NSOs. But because of their importance in the monitoring of development policies, it had become necessary to involve African NSOs in the data collection and processing. Indeed ICTs are a means to poverty reduction and to meeting some of the MDGs.
29. The Board agreed to recommend that ECA should cooperate with the national statistical systems to embark on the collection of statistics on Information and communication technologies for development in a harmonized framework.

Any other business (agenda item 9)

30. The members of the Board underscored their concern as to the short notice they had been given in the dissemination of the theme and the technical materials for the **African Statistics Day** celebration. The embargo issue was also raised as NSOs used to promote the event on the Television and Radio News the day before 18 November in order to reach as many people as possible **. Accordingly, the Board agreed to the recommendation that the communiqué should be released on 17 November.
31. In sum, the Board took note of proposals under the following areas:
 - a. Statistics in support of management for development results;
 - b. Governance;
 - c. Statistical development as an integral part of economic and social development; and
 - d. Promotion of unemployment statistics.

32. After an exchange of viewpoints, it was decided to leave the responsibility of proposing a theme to the Secretariat.
33. The Board did not discuss the sub-item concerning the **proposal of themes and issues for CODI-IV**. The Secretariat will make proposals in due course.
34. The Director of the Economic and Social Policy Division (ESPD) proposed to **change the appellation of ESPD** to either “Statistics, Economic and Social Policy Division” or “Economic and Social Policy and Statistics Division”. Some members of the Board proposed to introduce the word analysis in the name to make sense. Finally, the Board agreed on “Statistics, Analysis and Socio-Economic Policy Division”.

Provisional agenda, date and venue for the second session of ABSA

(agenda item 10)

35. The Board member from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) reiterated the offer of UBOS to host the coming ABSA meeting. The Secretariat will make proposals on the date and agenda of the second session of ABSA.

Closing remarks

36. The Executive Secretary joined the Board for the closing ceremony, where the recommendations were read and approved by the Board.
37. Thanking the participants for coming and sharing with ECA their concerns about statistics, he promised to earnestly consider the Board’s recommendations. It was never too late to revamp statistics at ECA. Regarding the work programme, United Nations procedures were still a pertinent issue but it was recognized that some flexibility had been introduced into the process of elaborating work programmes. The Board was informed that revision of the work programme for 2004-2005 would soon be underway and discussions would commence on the work programme 2006-2007. This would be an opportunity to bring on board the proposals discussed during the ABSA launching meeting.
38. The Executive Secretary also stressed the need for an African position in all domains and in statistics as well. Deriving from that was the need to formulate a statistical dimension of the NEPAD document in order to consolidate the adequate tools for its monitoring and evaluation.
39. In anticipation of the envisaged FASDEV meeting, he underscored the importance of partnership among the various stakeholders in Africa’s statistical development systems.

Annex I:

Recommendations

While appreciating the great effort made by ECA to design a framework for statistical development in Africa as recommended by CODI, the ABSA meeting recommends as follows:

1. To enhance the exercise of taking stock of current and foreseen statistical initiatives in the region, it is recommended that the list provided in the draft framework be enhanced by:
 - (a) Making sure that it is complete;
 - (b) Providing relevant details /profiles about the initiatives, including the beneficiaries, their time frames, geographic coverage, funding by source and amounts; etc.
2. Countries should be urged to design and implement statistical master plans, taking into account their own conditions. These plans should be designed to support policy initiatives, provide a road map for the development of the whole statistical system and be used for resource mobilization.
3. Countries, subregional and regional organizations should use the strategic framework as a basis for designing their own statistical master plans;
4. The meeting noted with great concern the low level of representation of African countries in international fora and the low representation of Africa's views concerning development of international standards, methodologies and frameworks. In this connection, it is recommended that:
 - (a) Before major international statistical events, e.g. the UN Statistical Commission, ECA should convene meetings leading to a regional position;
 - (b) Technical working groups should be set up to work on various subjects. ECA will coordinate the constitution of these working groups, in close collaboration with regional and sub-regional organizations, which will take the lead in organizing the discussions and/or convening meeting in specific areas. and
 - (c) Governments and development partners are urged to facilitate the participation of African statisticians in major international meetings.
5. The Board recommends that the statistical community in Africa should work closely with other stakeholders to establish system for monitoring and implementation of African development agendas (NEPAD, PRSP, MDGs, etc)
6. It is recommended that the statistical training centres should be strengthened and links between them established. The curricula should be reviewed taking into account emerging development issues

7. Networking and information sharing should be encouraged and promoted among data producers and users in countries; among sub-regional and regional organizations; and among donor agencies and international organizations at all levels;
8. In connection with the previous recommendation, it is recommended that the processes of developing appropriate peer review methodologies should be embarked upon.
9. Regarding the gender data issues, the Board recommends as follows:
 - (a) Reforming the National Statistical Systems (NSSs) to introduce regular household surveys, including time use studies, as part of their normal data collection services, to generate vital gender-disaggregated data;
 - (b) Adopting Satellite Accounts of Household Production (SAHP) to provide a database for strategic planning and policy analysis to identify more equitable and sustainable development options.

The Board appreciated the work done by ECA to develop the ECA statistics framework for action. Concerning the strategic directions, the Board also appreciated the action taken by ECA leadership to revamp the statistics function, especially with regard to human resources. Given the ECA statistics framework for action and the work programme as presented by the ECA Secretariat, it is recommended that:

10. The number of the staff should be increased with the right skills-mix;
11. The time frame for the initiative should be five (5) years. The implementation will be monitored and reviewed after five (5) years.
12. ECA should also include social statistics and indicators for MDGs and NEPAD in its work programme.

The work programme as presented is comprehensive. It is, therefore, recommended that:

13. Some prioritization should be done;
14. ECA should work out arrangements with partners in order to implement the statistical programme, taking into consideration work already being done by these partners;

While it is important that ECA builds a Data Hub for the provision of development data on Africa, it is recommended that:

15. ECA assists countries to develop socio-economic databases that can then be networked;
16. The databases should be easy to access and use;
17. Data quality issues should be addressed in developing these databases.

18. ECA should put emphasis on development and implementation of standards and frameworks to ensure that there is coherence in African statistics.
19. Advocacy work should have clear messages, targets, time frames and partnerships arrangements for its implementation.
20. ECA should cooperate with the National Statistical Systems (NSSs) to begin collecting statistics on Information and communication technologies for development in a harmonized framework.
21. ECA should work with the training centres in Africa to review programmes including:
 - a) Official statistics;
 - b) New development agenda in order to make statistical work relevant to these agenda.
22. It is recommended that ECA assist training centres with teaching materials and organizing of short courses and workshops in selected areas.
23. The Board proposed the new name of the Division in charge of statistics as «Statistics, Analysis and Socio-Economic Policy Division».

Annex 2:

Provisional agenda

1. Opening Ceremony
2. Election of officers
3. Adoption of the agenda and organizational matters
4. Adoption of the report of ABSA launching meeting
5. Statistical Development in Africa: A Strategic Framework
6. Statistics at ECA: A framework for action
7. Work programme 2004-2005
8. Information society and ICT indicators
9. Any other business
 - African Statistics Day 2004
 - Proposal of themes and issues to be discuss during CODI-IV
 - Any other business
10. Provisional agenda, date and venue for the second session of ABSA.
11. Conclusions and recommendations of ABSA first session.

Annex 3: List of documents distributed

Documents	Codes
List of documents	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E01
Provisional list of participants	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E02
Terms of reference of ABSA	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E03
Draft provisional annotated agenda	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E04
Provisional programme of work	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E05
Report of the launching meeting of ABSA	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E06
Statistical Development in Africa: A strategic framework (STAT-AFRICA)	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E07
Statistics at ECA: A framework for action	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E08
ECA Statistics programme of work	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E09
Information society statistics	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E10
African Statistics Day Themes (1993-2003)	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E11
CODI Themes of the workshop (2001-2003)	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E12
Recommendations	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E13
Background documents	
Report of the ICP-Africa Governing Board meeting	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E14
Report of the Un Statistical Commission	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E15
Report of the meeting on information society statistics	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E16
Report of the workshop on SCAN-ICT Review	ECA/ABSA/05/2004/E17

Annex 4: List of participants for ABSA Meeting

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