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**Annual Meeting of Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
13-14 June 2006**

ABSA Launching Meeting Report

ABSA Launching Meeting Addis Ababa, 16 May 2003

Draft Report

Introduction

The launching meeting of the Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa (ABSA) was held on Friday 16 May 2003 at the Conference Centre of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The meeting was opened to all the participants of the Sub-Committee on Statistics of the Committee on Development Information (CODI) third meeting. The members of the Committee or their representatives attended the meeting from the following countries and organizations: Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, Observatoire Economique et Statistique d'Afrique Sub-Saharienne (AFRISTAT), African Development Bank (ADB), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Statistique et d'Economie Appliquée d'Abidjan (ENSEA) and Eastern African Statistical Training Centre (EASTC). The representatives of Madagascar, South Africa and SADC were absent.

I. Opening session

I.1. Introductory remarks

In his introductory remarks, the Director of Economic and Social Policy Division (ESPD) reiterated ECA commitment to work for statistical development in Africa. He further requested the meeting to reconsider the report presented to CODI concerning the number of vacant statistical posts and its impact on the implementation of the work programme. ECA has obviously made changes in its statistical activities but it cannot be said that statistics is not given prominence by ECA.

This statement was followed by discussions that can be summarized as follows:

There is no clear policy on Statistics at ECA;

The process of rethinking Statistics in ECA was not re-echoed;

ECA failure to respond adequately to the expectations of member States in terms of being the authoritative repository of statistical data for Africa; the lack of databases of reliable and easily accessible data and the fact that the division in charge of Statistics does not provide the other ECA divisions with data ;

The reduction of the capacities and resources allocated to statistics;

The lack of communication from ECA while member States have needs and are expecting responses;

The shift of the centre of gravity of statistical activities from ECA to other institutions despite the fact that the requests by member States is not completely fulfilled. As long as ECA keeps thinking that things are going well while countries have a

completely different assessment of the situation, the dialogue of the deaf will continue;

The emergence of sub-regional institutions on the African statistical scene should be taken into account in the diagnostic of the situation. In any case, it is necessary to arrive at a consensus on the diagnostic;

The participants who are merely referring to the ECA report which indicated the high rate of vacancy of 40% which cannot go unnoticed;

The transfer of the statistical function to another division after CODI II is an indication that ECA does not have a clear direction in its policy;

The pursuit of more analytical activities is, of course, a positive trend but should not be conducted to the detriment of the strengthening of capacities in national accounts, household surveys and so on;

The fact that ECA does no longer provide support to the statistical training centres has an impact on the coordination of their programmes as well as on the review of programmes in light of the emerging trends in the demand of member States.

A point of order was raised stating that the point of discussion at the moment should be for consideration on the agenda item No3 and the meeting should now proceed to the election of officers.

1.2. Election of officers

The meeting elected the officers as follows:

- Chair : Kenya
- Vice-chair: Mauritania
- Rapporteur: Mozambique

II. Terms of Reference of the Advisory Board

The discussions on the terms of reference as submitted by CODI II were as follows :

Creation

It was recommended that :

- Reference should be made to the last ECA Conference of Ministers which adopted the resolution on the setting up of the Advisory Board in the paragraph relative to its creation;
- Institutional link of the board should be stressed by indicating explicitly that “it was created at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) the Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa (ABSA)”;
- the name of the Committee should be “Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa” (ABSA) in English and “Comité consultatif sur la Statistique en Afrique” in French with the acronym of ABSA.

Membership

The discussions particularly focused on the role of the observers. Some participants proposed that the directors of some divisions should be invited as observers, in

particular the Director of the Development Information Services Division (DISD) in order to facilitate the coordination of joint activities undertaken within CODI. Other participants stressed the need for the limitation of the number of observers who could influence the debate even if they will not participate in the decision-making. The idea of getting the maximum observers was also expressed.

Finally, it was recommended that:

- The number of members should be increased from 15 to 18 to take into account the fact the Director of Economic and Social Policy Division is an ex-officio member of the Board and that there are two other members, African Development Bank (ADB) and AFRISTAT which will participate at their own expenses. This arrangement allows two more countries to be represented at the board;
- Point 7 of the terms of reference should be rephrased as follows: “the Director of the Economic and Social Policy Division is an ex-officio member of the Board”;
- The number of observers should be limited to a third of the members.

Officers

It was recommended to add the following: “the secretariat of the Committee shall be serviced by the Economic and Social Policy Division”.

Meetings

A participant expressed the need to specify the sources of the funds needed to organize the extraordinary meetings of the Board. It is noted that the way the point related to the funding of the meetings has been clearly expressed.

III. Rules and Procedures

The meeting noted the need to:

- Specify the content of “National Statistical System” (NSS) as actors different from National Statistical Offices (NSOs) participate in the NSS;
- Go through the potential areas of intervention of ABSA in terms of: (i) organization, management and coordination of activities and statistical systems; (ii) strengthening capacities for the traditional production of data, training and research;
- Complete the NSSs by sub-regional statistical systems (SRSs) and regional statistical systems (RSSs) where those do not exist and/or widening the sphere of the existing SRSs and RSSs to other countries.

Finally, it was decided to refer to the usual rules and procedures of similar committees.

IV. What National Statistical Systems expect from ECA?

The relationship between CODI and the Statistics component was raised as the Statistical function was transferred from Development Information Services Division to Economic and Social Policy Division. Is there need to shift the sub-committee on

Statistics from CODI or to establish a joint Committee which brings together statisticians, planners and demographers? It was finally decided to maintain the status quo.

Specific issues highlighted include:

- The need to create synergies to reduce the burden of data collection of the countries;
- The advocacy on Statistics initiated by PARIS21 should be strengthened;
- The use of peer reviews to exchange best practices. ECA should organized these exchanges and promote south-south cooperation.
- The benchmarking is essential for peer review;
- The link between ECA sub-regional offices and the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) should be clarified;
- The sharing of expertise in the field of poverty mapping for example.

V. The way forward

The Director of ESPD thanked the participants for the frank dialogue that took place and indicated his willingness to work as a team in the service of the member States and provided the following information:

- An annual meeting of ABSA will be convened by ECA. The first meeting will be held during the last week of July 2003 ;
- ECA will make a proposal of a document concerning its vision and strategy for statistical development in ECA;
- The members of the Board will exchange their experiences on the ways and means of operationalizing the procedures and mechanisms of peer review.

Several issues were discussed including:

- The need to redefine of the name the Economic and Social policy Division to better emphasize the statistics function;
- The need to clarify the relationships between ABSA and CODI;
- The fact that meetings would be organized in member States on a rotational basis which will provide member States with an opportunity to share their experiences. Uganda offered to host the first meeting of ABSA in July 2003.

VI. Any other business

ECA is invited :

- To liaise with the Directors of National Statistical Offices in Ghana, Madagascar and Mozambique, for the identification of representatives of these countries as data users in ABSA;
- To submit the agenda and documentation to the members of the Committee, in time for a adequate preparation of the meeting.

Annex 1 :**Agenda**

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|-----------------------|--|
| 09:00 – 09:10 | I. Opening Session <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opening remarks• Election of the bureau of the Board (Chair, Vice-chair and Rapporteur) |
| 09:10 – 09 :40 | II. Review of the terms of reference of the board |
| 09:40 – 10:00 | III. Guidelines |
| 10:00 – 11:30 | IV. What are the expectations of the National Statistical Systems? |
| 11:30 – 12:30 | V. Implementation of the CODI recommendations |
| 12:30 – 13:00 | VI. Next steps |
| 13:00 – 13:30 | VII. Any other business |

Annex 2 :

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