

First Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV)

Opening statement

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
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Distinguished Partners in African Statistical Development,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you all to the first Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV). I am pleased that you have chosen to join us today for this important meeting.

As many of you may recall, the idea of FASDEV was first mooted at the ICP-Africa Governing Board meeting that I hosted here in Addis Ababa, in July last year.

During that meeting, I recognized the fact that we, at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), could do much more for statistical development in Africa than we have done in the recent past.

I also stressed the fact that, considering the situation of African statistical systems and the growing demand for data, no single institution by itself was capable of undertaking this task.

In that context, I highlighted the need for effective collaboration among African statistical development stakeholders, in order to build statistical capacity at the national and regional level in Africa.

This is the *raison d'être* of this forum, which I am pleased to inform you we, at ECA, are fully committed to.

Indeed, with guidance from the CODI sub-Committee on Statistics and from the Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa (ABSA), which just concluded its first meeting, ECA intends to remain fully engaged as an active partner in this effort.

In that regard, ECA has recently taken important steps to revitalize its statistics function in recognition of the challenges facing regional and national statistical systems.

The increased global need for a broader range of statistical information for monitoring progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and regional development initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), has clearly increased the urgency of this work.

FASDEV now also has a key role to play in promoting statistical development in Africa as it gives us all the opportunity to do the following:

- Assess the status of African statistical systems;
- Discuss the financing of statistical capacity building,
- Consider further modalities for collaboration in order to create more synergy among statistical programmes; and finally

- Discuss strategies to build advocacy for national statistical programmes.

Your discussion at this forum is thus important for it will help to clarify the general outline of statistical activities, including financial assistance and training in Africa; and therefore enable us to set up a permanent system for monitoring statistical developments in the continent.

This in turn will help African countries that are making efforts to mainstream statistical functions more comprehensively with financial and technical support from multiple donor sources.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you know, we have many challenges before us in our quest to improve the performance of statistical systems in African countries.

Despite several initiatives at the international, regional, sub-regional and national levels, over the past decade, to revive the statistical infrastructure and capacity building on the ground there is still a lot of work to be done.

Strong statistical systems are now urgently needed as we strive to achieve the MDGs in Africa.

In the context of implementing policies to help them make progress in this area, African governments have to:

- (a) assess policy and programme options aimed at improving the well being of the population,
- (b) monitor progress in economic management, poverty reduction and other public sectoral policies, and
- (c) govern and administer their states in a democratic and accountable manner.

To monitor progress and the effectiveness of their development policies, they need good and reliable data. Too often in the past, the lack of reliable statistical information has misled our policy makers: leading to faulty analysis and faulty policy recommendations.

At the social level, a typical example of such a situation is the enrolment and literacy rates that are derived from out of date population census data and disorganized administrative records. This can result in the derailing of education sector budgets and national manpower plans.

At the macroeconomic level, unreliable indicators have also impeded some African countries' eligibility to the debt relief resources available through HIPC facility for example.

We therefore must do all we can to address these problems as speedily as possible. The road to achieving the MDGs in Africa is long already enough.

We cannot allow poor statistics to hold us back as well. Ladies and gentlemen,

This Forum can now make an effective contribution by charting the way forward in critical areas. As a key input to this task, ECA has drafted a strategic framework document- that aims to serve as a road map for statistical development in Africa.

This framework has already been examined this week by ABSA, and your meeting will also be given

the opportunity to discuss it.

We hope it will greatly inform your discussion and subsequent proposals on how best to foster strong regional and international partnerships to improve statistical development in Africa.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.
