

First Forum on African Statistical Development
(FASDEV)
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Opening statement
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(Transcript of a video recorded statement)

Hello, my name is Richard Manning. I am the chairman of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee and co-chair of the PARIS21 Consortium.

I would like to thank the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank, and PARIS21 for allowing me to address you at this Forum on African Statistical Development. I am sorry that I could not be with you in person.

With the Millennium Declaration in 2000, the joint statement issued from the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002, and the Marrakech Second International Roundtable for Managing for Development Results in 2004, the regional and international development agenda is evolving. In particular, the demand for development data, to feed both the national and international statistical systems, is accelerating.

With this increased demand, an increased recognition is emerging that statistical data are essential on many fronts. Namely, for the analysis and diagnosis of development and poverty reduction policies, for priority setting and development strategy formulation, for the monitoring of programme implementation and of progress toward development goals such as the MDGs, for the evaluation of outcomes and impacts, for feedback to the next policy round, for evidence-based and results-based management of development issues, and for the effectiveness of donor aid.

Statistics are a policy issue, not just a technical one. They are a vital ingredient in policy setting and decision-making; and crucial to improve governance, accountability and transparency.

To respond to this growing demand for data, countries along with their multilateral and bilateral donor partners must ensure the building of statistical capacities. The Manakch Action Plan for Statistics recommends that this be set within the context of a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics, with the aim that all low-income countries will have developed a strategy by 2006.

A National Strategy for the Development of Statistics provides an overall vision for the development of the national statistical system as part of the information and monitoring processes needed by countries for national development and Poverty Reduction Strategies, such as PRSPs, as well as for 2010 and 2015 MDG monitoring. It also serves as a framework for international and bilateral assistance. The NSDS will include national, regional, and international needs; include all parts of the national statistical system; and address issues related to the analysis and use of data.

What role do donors and the UN play in national statistical efforts? In addition to their funding role, they serve as major users of nationally produced data to measure progress toward MDGs, to monitor aid programmes and outcomes and to gauge aid effectiveness. UN agencies set standards and develop methods adapted to developing country needs, and they disseminate national statistics and incorporate them into their own institution's databases.

National strategies for the development of statistics are, therefore, important to donors as well as to countries. For donors, these strategies:

- a) Provide a relevant, realistic evaluation of country needs in statistical matters;
- b) Present a coherent framework for aid harmonisation;
- c) Offer a long-term vision of needs; and
- d) Include the international demand for statistics.

Donors' direct policy dialogue with developing countries must therefore include statistical development. Its integration into the mainstream of overall development policy and its inclusion in national budgets and general aid programmes are necessary conditions of the sustainability of development.

It is my hope that this Forum will recommend a list of actions, highlighting the importance of:

- a) Partnership;
- b) National strategies for the development of statistics;
- c) Better use of statistics; and
- d) Increased financial support to statistics and statistical development.

I furthermore urge donors and UN agencies to face the challenge of helping countries to build and develop national capacities to produce relevant, good quality, and timely statistical data for the development and implementation of poverty reduction and other development strategies, for good governance and monitoring and evaluation of PRSs and MDGs.

I would like to thank once again the UNECA, the African Development Bank, and PARIS21 for inviting me to speak at this important event.