

Forum on African Statistical Development
(FASDEV)

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Statement
by Omar Kabaj
President of the African Development Bank Group

The Executive Secretary of ECA, Dr. K.Y. Amoako,
Distinguished Delegates and Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

I am very pleased to be here with you today and grateful to all those who have made this meeting possible. I am increasingly convinced that the availability of comprehensive, timely and reliable statistical information is a powerful tool for assessing economic and social realities, guiding evidence based policies, and monitoring progress towards meeting development objectives. I, therefore, feel honored to address your meeting today and only regret that I could not be with you personally to participate in it.

Before continuing, let me first of all extend a special thank you to the Executive Secretary of ECA, Mr. K.Y. Amoako, particularly and to express to him my heartfelt appreciation for having graciously offered to host this forum. Further, let me join the Executive Secretary in welcoming all participants. We look forward to your valuable contributions to this important meeting and count on your future close cooperation.

Increased Demand for Better Statistics

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three months ago, at the Second International Round Table on Managing for Development Results held at Marrakech, Morocco, I made the point that it is my belief that development effectiveness, indisputably, is today at the center of development discourse. Both the international donor community and

developing countries are giving high priority to enhancing the development impact of their interventions: Stakeholders are calling upon us to measure and demonstrate the economic and social impacts of our interventions. This is critical to enable us to improve the quality of the projects and programs that we support, individually and collectively.

This shift to an evidence-based approach to development has raised the profile of statistics but at the same time highlighted the fact that many of our member countries lack the necessary capacity to provide reliable statistics for guiding policy on some of the most important development issues. These inadequacies translate into an inability to meet corresponding data demands to support PRSPs and the effective monitoring of progress towards the achievement of internationally agreed MDGs and to reach declared poverty reduction objectives in particular.

Recent Efforts by ADB to Develop Statistical Capacity in Africa

Conscious of the pressing need for an information system built on reliable, timely and up-to-date data, the ADB has launched a continent-wide program for data collection and statistical capacity building, within the general framework of the International Comparison Program for Africa (ICP-Africa). This ambitious program is being undertaken in close collaboration with the World Bank and the ECA. ICP-Africa has two primary objectives. The immediate objective, as I am sure you all know, is to provide sound and internationally comparable data, with the objective of measuring poverty and monitoring progress towards meeting the MDGs. It does this by collecting and disseminating purchasing power parity (PPP) data to compare economic and social conditions among countries. A further objective is to promote statistical capacity building in the collection and analysis of economic and price data.

The ADB recognizes that forming a consortium of national, regional and international partners, identifying synergies, coordinating efforts, and pooling resources are critical for the successful implementation of a region wide program such as ICP-Africa. In pursuance of these objectives, we welcome the financial and in-kind contributions of the World Bank, the ECA, the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, the Norwegian Development Agency and the African Capacity Building Foundation. For its part, the ADB recognizes and prescribes to the Marrakech action plan that calls for scaling up financial contributions. In this respect, in addition to financing the preparatory and ongoing activities of ICP-Africa, the ADB is also finalizing arrangements necessary to support national capacity building efforts in its regional member countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Great strides have been made over the last two years and a half. Fifty-one African countries have signed on, both as partners and beneficiaries of the ICP program. We have conducted comprehensive statistical assessments in 47 African countries. Discussion is underway with the World Bank to help member countries develop comprehensive statistical master plans in compliance with the Marrakech Action Plan. And we are working closely with the IMF to build the capacities of regional training centers in the areas of price statistics and National Accounts.

Over the past year, we have conducted three region-wide seminars that brought together Heads of National Statistical Institutions, managers of national statistical programs and regional statistical agencies, eminent African statisticians, as well as representatives of international institutions and the donor community. A governance structure has been established as a partnership based program. In this respect, a consortium of national, regional and international institutions has been established under the auspices of the ICP-Africa Governing Board -which is responsible for identifying priority areas, setting short-term and long-term goals, and overseeing the successful implementation of ICP-Africa and related capacity building initiatives. Our common vision to provide a sound knowledge base through region-wide capacity building has truly cemented our partnership and opened a new chapter in statistical work in Africa. This spirit was reflected in the Yaounde declaration of the Directors of National Statistical Institutions from 51 African countries who called upon the international community and African governments to scale up the statistical capacity building program we have jointly developed.

As we acknowledge the milestones reached thus far, we need to remind ourselves about the enormity of the work ahead of us. We need to build on the momentum we have created together. And importantly, we need to expand both the breadth and depth of the partnership we established in Addis in July 2003 following the inauguration of the ICP-Africa Governing Board.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the next two days, you will be holding discussions that, among other things, should contribute towards both broadening and deepening the partnership we have established together. The current effort emphasizes mainly national accounts and price statistics. Looking at the agenda of this meeting and the composition of the list of participants, I am convinced that

you will work towards expanding both the membership and the mandate of the ICP-Africa Governing Board to address other equally pressing areas in economic as well as social statistics.

We recognize that the statistical capacity needs of the continent are enormous and the current partnership alone cannot satisfy all these needs. We need to make a concerted effort to bring on board more partners. We are therefore pleased to note the effective involvement of the World Bank, the IMF, DFID, NORAD, the ECA and the ACBF in efforts to meet this challenge. The ADB also wishes to underscore the contribution of regional institutions such as AFRISTAT, ECOWAS, SADC and COMESA with whom we shall be implementing ICP-Africa activities in the 51 participating countries. It is also worth mentioning that in this effort African countries are at the same time beneficiaries and potential suppliers of resources within the framework of intra-African exchanges.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is clear that the challenges of statistical capacity building are undoubtedly complex; yet tracking the evolution in statistical capacity is crucial if we are to meet the increasing demands that are put on our statistical systems.

Considering the key role of statistics in the management and planning of development, I would like, in conclusion, to appeal to African governments to give more support to their statistical systems by increasing the budgetary, material and human resources of national statistical offices so that they can effectively perform their duties. This appeal also goes to international development institutions and bilateral co-operation agencies to generously support the efforts of the African countries.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you fruitful and productive deliberations.

