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Implementation of resolution 859 (XLI) on the African Charter on Statistics

Progress report

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in its resolution 859(XLI), approved the draft African Charter on Statistics and requested the Commission, in collaboration with the members of the African statistical system, to:

- Submit the draft African Charter on Statistics for review by legal experts;
- Take all necessary measures to submit the revised draft Charter to the Executive Council and to the Conference of Heads of State and Government for adoption; and
- Finalize the studies on the mechanisms for implementing the Charter and to create the fund for statistical development.

2. In accordance with those recommendations, the African Union Commission (AUC) embarked on various activities in collaboration with ECA, the African Development Bank (AfDB), members of the African statistical system and development partners.

3. The present report reviews the actions taken and the results achieved, and formulates recommendations for ongoing and future activities.

II. AFRICAN CHARTER ON STATISTICS

2.1 Adoption of the draft Charter by the Conference of African Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General

4. Following the approval of the draft African Charter on Statistics by the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the African Union Commission organized a Conference of African Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General in Kigali, Rwanda, from 27 October to 4 November 2008. That conference was preceded by a meeting of legal experts, who reviewed and amended the draft Charter and recommended to the Ministers that it should be adopted. The Ministers then, considered the amended draft Charter and recommended its adoption by the Executive Council and the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

5. The amendments made by the Ministers concerned *Chapter 4, article 4, (Obligations of the Parties), which previously read as follows:*

Article 4
Obligations of the Parties

1. *States Parties accept the objectives and principles enshrined in this Charter.*
 2. *States Parties undertake to institute appropriate measures, especially legislative, regulatory and administrative measures to ensure that their laws and regulations are in conformity with this Charter.*
6. This article now reads:

Article 4
Commitment of the States Parties

States Parties accept the objectives and principles enshrined in this Charter to reinforce their statistical policies and systems and undertake to institute appropriate measures, especially legislative, regulatory and administrative to ensure that their laws and regulations are in conformity with this Charter.

2.2 Adoption of the Charter by the Executive Council and by the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the African Union

7. In accordance with the recommendation made by the Conference of African Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General, the 14th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council considered the draft Charter, adopted it and recommended its adoption by the Conference of Heads of State and Government.
8. The Conference of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, at its 12th Ordinary Session, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 3 February 2009, adopted the African Charter on Statistics, by decision No. **ASSEMBLY/AU/DEC.210 (XII)**, and called on all the member States to sign and ratify the Charter as expeditiously as possible so as to enable it to enter into force, and thus provide a regulatory framework for statistics development in the continent.
9. The Charter, as a legal instrument in support of statistics development in Africa, sets out the methodological and ethical principles which are to guarantee the production in real time of quality, harmonized statistics on Africa as a whole, in order to meet the needs and standards which make them Africa's statistics of reference.
10. To this end, all members of Africa's statistical system, all statisticians and development partners in Africa are invited to assume ownership of the Charter, promote it in their respective countries, use it as the reference for all their activities, and uphold the principles espoused therein.

11. The effective implementation of the Charter calls for increased and effective collaboration among providers, producers and users of statistical data. There is a need to establish a rapport among the various stakeholders in Africa's statistical system in order to strengthen statistical coordination and ensure the quality and usefulness of statistical information.

12. Under the Charter, African policymakers are urged to use observed facts as the basis for all policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation. Indeed, statistical information should be considered as an indispensable public good for the purpose of decision-making. Given that implementation of the Charter calls for financial resources and strengthened institutional capacity in Africa's statistical system, African States are enjoined to guarantee steady and adequate funding for statistical activities, and to strengthen the independence and status of national statistical institutes and statistical services at the regional and continental levels.

III. COORDINATION MECHANISM FOR THE CHARTER

13. To build a charter implementation mechanism, the Commission engaged a consultant to conduct a study on the subject in collaboration with the African Centre for Statistics. The objectives of the study were to assess the African statistical system with a view to identifying areas that might impede the implementation of the African Charter on Statistics, and to propose an appropriate coordination mechanism with a view to enhancing implementation of the Charter using that assessment as a starting point.

14. The study necessitated extensive consultations with statistical agencies at the national, regional and continental levels as well as with development partners based outside the continent. A survey was also conducted amongst members of the African's statistical system in order to assess the problems linked to the production of harmonized statistics.

15. The study made it possible to identify the actors in Africa's statistical system, to define their role and to study coordination bodies and their terms of reference. Additionally, an implementation strategy was proposed for the African Charter on Statistics. This strategy rests on three strategic objectives broken down into nine areas of focus with specific actions underpinning each area of focus.

16. The main findings and the key conclusions and recommendations of the study were discussed and validated at the meeting on the coordination mechanism for the implementation of the African Charter on Statistics held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire on 4 and 5 August 2008.

17. Following those discussions, recommendations were proposed for streamlining the coordination mechanism.

18. Moreover, the recommendations of the meeting of the African Committee on Statistical Coordination held on 9 and 10 September in Tunis, Tunisia, also helped to improve the findings of the study.

19. For the proper implementation of the Charter and for statistical harmonization, the study proposes the following coordination mechanism:

- *At national level*, it is proposed to revitalize or establish national statistical coordination committees (NSCCs) in each country, which will comprise all the members of the national statistical systems (i.e. ministries, statistical training institutions, central banks, and other technical structures devoted to statistics production). Over and above their usual core function, which is to define, coordinate and set out the spectrum of statistical studies, projects and surveys as well as administrative enquiries for statistical operations designed to meet national needs in the economic, financial, social, population and other spheres of activity, they will also have to: **(i) monitor the implementation of the Charter at national level; (ii) implement the statistical guidelines and regulations adopted at continental level; (iii) respond to requests for data pertaining to Africa's integration through the production and validation of the relevant data; and (iv) compile reports on the status of statistics and implementation of the Charter.** The national statistical institutions (NSIs) will be expected to play a key role in facilitating these committees and coordinating the operations of national statistical systems, while ensuring that each stakeholder amply fulfils its role in order to produce real-time, reliable and harmonized statistics on all aspects of integration;
- *At regional level*, the establishment of regional statistical coordination committees (RSCCs) comprising general managers from the regional economic communities (RECs), statistical agencies at the regional level and statistical units of the RECs, as well as partners. They will be responsible, inter alia, for: **(i) monitoring the implementation of the Charter at the regional level; (ii) coordinating the implementation of statistical guidelines and regulations in their respective regions and reporting thereon to the African Union Commission (AUC); (iii) gathering of data validated in each country and verifying their coherence; (iv) compiling these data and submitting them to the African Union (AU).** The secretariats or commissions of the RECs shall provide the staffing for these committees and oversee statistical coordination actions in each subregion;
- *At continental level*, the establishment of a High Council for Statistics in Africa (HCSA) comprising general managers of NSIs, heads of statistical services at the regional and continental levels, and partners. HCSA will be responsible for, inter alia, with **(i) monitoring the implementation of the Charter at the continental level; (ii) validating guidelines or regulations on statistics production proposed by specialized technical committees and submitting them to the decision-making organs of AU for adoption; (iii) monitoring the implementation of the guidelines at national level and reporting thereon to the decision-making organs of AU; and (iv) addressing new challenges in the field of statistics. The AUC shall provide the staffing for HCSA and ensure that every member of the African statistical system plays its role. The AUC shall be assisted in its task by the other continental organizations. The consultative framework between the continental organizations**

and the RECs shall be strengthened by the revitalization of the African Statistical Coordination Committee (ASCC). This forum for dialogue and consultation should facilitate discussion of issues pertaining to capacity-building at the level of the NSS and the RECs; coordination of implementation of approved guidelines and regulations; and harmonization of statistical programmes and production of continent-wide data and aggregates;

- Specialized technical committees, based on the key areas of harmonization of integration statistics, responsible for ***defining common methodologies for statistical production and draft guidelines and regulations for submission to HCSA for consideration and validation and subsequent submission to the organs of AUC for adoption.*** The guidelines and regulations shall be implemented by all member States. The committees will be staffed by the AUC, in collaboration with other Pan-African organizations and will be charged also with the task of supporting member States in the implementation of the set guidelines and rules.

The African statistics fund

20. The study on the African statistics fund was conducted simultaneously with that on the coordination mechanism for implementation of the Charter. The main objective of this study was to examine in detail the concept of a statistics fund and to identify ways and means of bringing it to fruition.

21. Comprehensive consultations were conducted at the level of national, regional and continental statistical organizations as well as with development partners based outside the continent. Discussions with stakeholders during the consultation and the meeting in Abidjan which was organized to examine in detail the findings of the study demonstrated the need and the urgency of establishing the fund in order to provide adequate and stable financing for Africa's statistical system as well as for statistical activities in Africa. **Indeed, over 90 per cent of the stakeholders and respondents indicated clearly that the real problem of statistical development in Africa was the lack of sustainable financing for statistical programmes, despite the existence of a few statistical funds and the interventions of development partners.**

22. An analysis of the findings of the study reveals (i) the reasons for the low level of resource allocation to statistics in Africa; (ii) the areas or programmes that may be financed through the fund; and (iii) the beneficiaries of the fund as well as the modalities for its establishment.

(i) ***Reasons for the low level of resource allocation to statistics***

23. The study came up with such reasons as:

- Lack of policy support for statistics at national level;

- A low level of interest in statistics and poor use of statistics in decision-making and policy formulation by decision makers and other development actors;
- The resources mobilized under existing funds at national level are often not committed to those funds;
- The short-term nature of national and regional funds, making it difficult to provide continuous support for statistics.

(ii) Areas or programmes that may be financed through the fund

24. The study proposes the following areas or programmes, that may be financed through the fund:

- Harmonization programme for regional and continental statistical integration (thus translating the AU and RECs integration process into the statistical domain in order to identify the priority sectors and the relevant statistics);
- National statistical development strategies;
- Statistical capacity-building programmes;
- Regional programmes and continental challenges and concerns (climate change and environmental degradation, agriculture, HIV/AIDS, informal sector, etc.);
- Upgrading programmes for countries with low statistical capacities in order to bring them up to par with other countries;
- General Population and Housing Censuses (RGPH) and especially countries that still lack the capacity to conduct them;
- Boosting statistical training programmes and research activities, including the granting of scholarships;
- Statistical coordination and cooperation programmes;
- Cross-border statistical surveys and programmes;
- ICT development for the preservation and dissemination of statistical data;
- Activities of African statistical associations

(iii) Beneficiaries of the African Fund for Statistical Development

25. The beneficiaries of the fund shall include:

- National statistical institutions and national statistical systems;
- Statistical colleges and schools;
- Regional statistical agencies/institutions;
- Continental statistical organizations; and
- Individuals/statisticians (scholarships).

(iv) Resource mobilization strategy for the fund

26. The study proposes the following resource mobilization strategy:

- Develop a continental strategic plan for statistical development taking into account all existing initiatives at all levels (i.e. national statistical systems; regional statistical programmes of the RECs; the African integration statistical development programme of AUC and all continental initiatives); on the basis of this strategic plan, develop clear 2- to 5-year programme of work, and the budgetary estimate for the strategic plan to represent the overall sum of the Funds;
- Establish linkages between the African statistics fund and the resources mobilized in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through the MDG Africa Steering Group;
- Establish statistical programmes adapted to the areas of intervention of development partners (which constitute indirect, or virtual, contributions to the African statistics fund);
- Organize a donor conference or round table to promote statistical development in Africa;
- Mobilize African and international foundations to finance statistics;
- Educate member States about their primary responsibility for the development of statistics in Africa;
- Educate development partners to honour their commitments and lend support to statistical development strategies in Africa.

27. In addition to suggestions made at the meeting in Abidjan to enhance the study, AUC was requested, in collaboration with AfDB and ECA, to conduct a detailed technical study on the practical or strategic approaches to be adopted for mobilizing financial resources for the prompt establishment of the Fund, with a clear identification of the sources of finance.

IV. DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGY PAPER ON THE HARMONIZATION OF INTEGRATION STATISTICS

28. In order to bring statistical production into line with Africa's development needs and priorities and with the timetable for the political, economic, social and cultural integration process spearheaded by the African Union Commission, it was imperative to formulate and implement a strategy that would bring together all stakeholders, define and specify their interventions and the modalities through which they could work effectively and collectively to produce in real time, quality and harmonized data for Africa as a whole.

29. There are many basic reasons for formulating and implementing such a statistical harmonization strategy for Africa. First, to achieve the main objective of the African Charter on Statistics, which is to provide an appropriate framework for harmonized statistical information in Africa, with a view to enhancing their comparability between countries and between subregions. Second as the RECs are experiencing in their varied and heterogeneous ways, producing the statistics necessary for defining, following up and evaluating the policies, programmes and projects which underpin the process of integration at the subregional level, requires harmonized reference statistics that are produced regularly and are available in real time for continental integration programmes. The production of these statistics will have to be aligned, both upstream and downstream, to the needs highlighted over time by the process of African integration. Third, statistical integration across the continent calls for commitment and input on the part of all stakeholders of the African statistical system. It is important, therefore, to design a strategy that integrates all the stakeholders, and sets out and specifies their interventions and the modalities that would allow them to work effectively and collectively for the development of **harmonized statistics adapted to the needs of African integration.**

30. Accordingly, AUC, in collaboration with ECA and AfDB, has begun to develop a policy paper on the conduct of the statistical harmonization process. A progress report on the experiences on the ground within the continent and further afield on the production of harmonized statistics is being prepared, in order to assess the work to be done and to find the best ways and means of producing statistics that are comparable continent-wide.

31. To that end, consultations are under way with statistical agencies at all levels. This document will initially be validated in August 2009 by African statistical experts and then submitted to the organs of the African Union for adoption. It is expected to provide Africa with a strategic framework for the production of harmonized statistical data to serve the cause of Africa integration.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

32. In order to speed up the implementation of present and future activities, the following actions are recommended:

(i) Signature and ratification of the African Charter on Statistics

- Invite all member States to sign and ratify the Charter so that it can enter into force as expeditiously as possible;
- Request the Commission, in collaboration with the PARIS 21 mechanism, to formulate an advocacy strategy for the ratification of the Charter and for statistics development;
- Request the Commission, in collaboration with the PARIS 21 mechanism and EUROSTAT, to formulate a mechanism for peer review of the Charter;

(ii) Implementation of the Charter coordination mechanism

- Adopt the coordination mechanism and request the Commission, in collaboration with members of the African statistical system, to put the mechanism into practice;

(iii) Study on the African statistics fund

- Request AUC to carry out a detailed technical study, in collaboration with AfDB and ECA, on practical mechanisms or strategies to be put in place for the mobilization of financial resources to expedite the establishment of the envisaged fund, with clear identification of the sources of financing;

(iv) Preparation of a strategy paper on harmonization of integration statistics

- Request AUC, in collaboration with the members of the African statistical system, to finalize the formulation of the strategy paper on harmonization of integration statistics, in order to provide a framework for dialogue and consultation for all statistical stakeholders, thus enabling them to work effectively towards a real-time and consistent production of quality harmonized statistics that can be used to guide development programmes and policymaking on the future of the continent.