

African Statisticians Adopt the Robben Island Declaration

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Cape Town, 24 January 2012 (ECA) - The African statistical community Monday adopted the Robben Island Declaration on Statistical Development with the ambition of using statistics to help free the continent from poverty.

The declaration came at the end of the third meeting of the Statistical Commission for Africa in Cape Town, South Africa from 18 – 23 January. The meeting was held back-to-back with the Symposium on Statistical Development in Africa.

Dimitri Sanga, director of the African Centre for Statistics, said the declaration marks another milestone in the development of statistics in Africa. He also noted that statistics were not only important for measuring progress, but also essential for driving progress.

"Since the Conference of Ministers of finance, planning and economic development of 2004 made a declaration on promoting employment, African ministers have been asking for statistics on employment, the labour market as an essential part for crafting policies for poverty alleviation," he said.

The demand for statistics is putting extra pressure on national statistical offices to come with data to help ministers make informed policy choices. Delegates thanked ECA for all the hard work it is doing in advocacy and promotion of statistics in Africa and providing technical assistance and raising funds to support member states.

Pali Lehohla, Statistician General of South Africa said statistics are "declarative and not investigative." Once the figures are published, they are taken as a given. Therefore, statisticians had to ensure the highest level of integrity and probity in their work to make sure that data is accurate, trustworthy, and contributes to lifting millions of Africans out of poverty.

The declaration tackles numerous technical areas for collection and analysis of statistics, including labour market information systems; on implementing the strategy for the harmonization of statistics in Africa; on ensuring that statistics collected in African countries are comparable across borders; and on upgrading the system of national accounts. It also covers areas of gender, agriculture, infrastructure, the informal sector and on development indicators.

The commission called on all African countries to ratify the African Statistics charter and called on the African Union to conduct an Africa-wide programme to ensure that this happens as soon as possible.

The meeting was also attended by a group of young statisticians as part of a programme for sustainable development of statistics in Africa.

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