

Press Releases

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7th Meeting of the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development (CASD): Task Forces Take the Lead in Statistical Development in Africa

Addis Ababa, 21 May 1997: The state of information development in Africa is characterized by lack or poor quality of data, weak or inadequate telecommunications systems, lack of a critical mass of trained personnel and laws and regulations that impede information flows, a senior United Nations said here today.

K.Y. Amoako, United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) made this remark in an address to the beginning of 7th Meeting of the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development (CASD).

With ECA as its Secretariat CASD was established in 1992 as an inter-agency committee to "coordinate and direct efforts to revitalize and develop" African statistical systems following the complete loss of infrastructure and disintegration of some statistical services in the 1980s.

Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Morocco, Mozambique, South Africa and Uganda represent African Member States in CASD with Afristat, Eurostat, UK-ODA, US Bureau of the Census, World Bank, UN statistical Division, Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, Statistics Sweden as the multilateral and bilateral component. The Institute of Applied Economics (ISAE), Makerere University, Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Statistique et d'Economie Appliquée de Côte d'Ivoire stand in for African regional training centres.

An integral part of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in 1990s adopted by the African Planners, Statisticians and Demographers in 1990, CASD is also an implementation mechanism for the Plan of Action.

Having dissolved its sub-committees at its 6th Meeting in March 1996, CASD is at a cross-roads. On the table for discussion is an ECA initiative to replace Task Forces for the old sub-committees that managed training; research, methods and standards; data processing and organisation and management of National Statistical Systems.

The Task Forces would develop:

1. Connectivity of CASD members;
2. Electronics Data Processing (EDP) capability for African countries;
3. Promotion of gender desegregated data in Africa;
4. Measurement and Monitoring of poverty in Africa;

Strengthening of the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA) Centres and establishment of an African Household Data/ Archive Service Centre are also to come within the mandate of the Task Forces.

Assuring the meeting of ECA's commitment as it performs its role as a "catalyst in driving forward the statistical agenda in Africa as a central issue of the information services and development", K.Y. Amoako added that the CASD secretariat should be "enabled to function more effectively in addressing the priority needs of coordination and facilitating the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action".

A burning issue on the Committee's agenda is the mobilization of resources. Aware that the United Nations Regular Budget and Regular Programme Support for Technical Assistance were unlikely to rise to the occasion because of the United Nations financial crisis, ECA has tabled fresh solutions to CASD's financial crunch:

- Taking advantage of UNDP's Support Services for Policy and Programme Development (SSPPD)

Changes have taken place in UNDP after the evaluation of the 5th UNDP Programme Cycle. The agency has recognized the coordinative role of regional policy support and has recently changed policy by including the Regional Commissions for funding under SSPPD. UNDP's change of tack affords Regional Commissions the opportunity to "focus mainly on upstream work to support national and regional programme development".

- Tapping funding agencies

This would entail an active review of funding agencies' policies, particularly with regard to sectoral decision making.

- Establishment of a specific Statistics Development Fund under the United Nations Trust Fund for African Development

ECA has ear-marked some activities for which funding could be considered:

- (a) Needs Assessment and strategy development
- (b) Monitoring the implementation of the Plan of Action at national and regional levels
- (c) Management training for Directors of national statistical services
- (d) Improving methodologies for collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of data

The meeting could well add some other activities. In this connection K.Y Amoako said:

"As partners in statistical development, we welcome new proposals from you regarding the strengthening of statistical activities in Africa".

<< Back to: [Press Releases for 1997](#)