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**Annual Meeting of Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
13-14 June 2006**

**Report of the Second Meeting of the
Advisory Board on Statistics
in Africa**

Attendance

The second session of ABSA was held at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 24 April 2005.

The meeting started at 9:30 a.m., and was attended by the following board members: Angola, Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, COMESA, ECOWAS, East African Statistical Training Centre (EASTC).

The meeting was also attended by observers from the following countries and organizations: Ethiopia, France, Mauritius, Morocco, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Zambia, AFRISTAT, Makerere University, PARIS21, PHCCO, and UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

Opening of ABSA

The opening session was chaired by the outgoing chairperson, from South Africa, called the meeting to order. The Director of ESPD, Mr. Augustin Fosu, made the opening statement.

Election of officers, adoption of the agenda and organization of work

The Board elected the following Bureau:

Chairperson	:	Ghana
Vice-Chairperson	:	Nigeria
Rapporteur	:	East African Statistical Training Centre, Tanzania (EASTC)

The meeting adopted the draft agenda with one amendment.

ECA's Statistical activities for the biennium 2004-2005 and plan for the biennium 2006-2007

ECA reported the implementation of its statistical activities for 2004-2005 and the proposed work programme for the biennium 2006-2007. The main issues addressed were:

- Substantive servicing of intergovernmental expert bodies;
- Preparation of parliamentary documents;
- Recurrent and non-recurrent publications;
- Promotional material for African Statistics Day;
- Website and regional statistical database development; and,
- Training and Fellowship programmes.

ECA mentioned that the implementation of its 2004/2005-work programme was not exactly as planned, due to inadequate human and financial resources.

The proposed work programme for 2006-2007 biennium is an extension of the 2004-2005 programme with three additional components. The first is a field project that would seek to strengthen national capacities in the implementation of SNA 1993, through advisory services, group training development of methodological guidelines, manuals, and software and research activities. The second, aims to strengthen the capacity of African statistical systems to generate sex-disaggregated data. Both projects are dependent on external funding. Funds are still being sought for the first, but the second is to be funded by the United Nations Development Account. The third is a project by the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP), scheduled to begin in 2006, in which ECA and other United Nations regional commissions would be participating.

ECA requested the Board to advise and comment on what ECA could have achieved, and what needs to be achieved regarding the 2006-2007 work programme.

Issues raised

1. The Board took note of the activities covered under the 2004-2005 programme by the ECA Statistics Team, and the significant constraints that the team had been confronted with. Not only was the team understaffed, and financial resources limited, but it had also experienced a high turnover of its staff.
2. The Board stressed the importance of ensuring institutional memory and called for urgent consideration to be given to correcting the low priority given to statistics in the ECA overall programme.
3. The Board recalled that the issue of raising the status of ECA statistics in the organizational structure of the Commission had been raised on several occasions at previous meetings of CODI, and stressed that the continued weak position of ECA Statistics undermined the credibility of ECA and limited its impact in the statistical community.
4. There was some concern that ECA had low visibility in the region. There was little or no representation of ECA statistics at regional and international meetings when Africa needed to be heard, and at workshops there was need for more substantive contributions to be made by ECA Statistics.
5. It was noted that the focus of ECA Statistics programmed seemed to be directed more towards servicing of meetings, rather than to methodological or substantive work. It was important for ECA statistics to identify its strengths and areas in which it could make significant contribution in the development of statistics. Several possibilities were identified, including coordination of statistical work at the regional level; collaborating and partnering with sub-regional institutions such as AFRISTAT, ECOWAS, SADC, etc., in the implementation of statistical activities; promoting statistical training in established regional and sub-regional training centres; and being a source of information on the state of statistics in member states.
6. The work of the Team on the statistical database was welcomed as good basis for building information base, but more needed to be done if the ECA Statistics is to become a major source of information about national statistical systems.
7. There is need for better coordination of statistics at the national level, and for countries to be better informed about the international agenda related to the

development of master plans for statistics. This was also an area where the Board thought ECA could play an important role.

8. The meeting also took note of the efforts AFRISTAT was making, in particular towards training in SNA93 implementation, and the interest expressed by AFRISTAT to collaborate in this area of its work with ECA Statistics. As many countries in Africa have great difficulties to compile the definitive set of accounts required for the SNA93, it would be necessary for ECA to provide stronger leadership in the implementation of SNA93 in the Africa region, working with other institutions that are already playing a key role in this area of work in the region.
9. A member of the Board observed that the hands-on approach of AFRISTAT to training, whereby experts visit country offices and work with staff directly on the preparation of the national accounts, was highly beneficial, and it would be a useful approach for ECA Statistics to add to its selection of methods.
10. Tunisia reported having received extensive technical assistance from INSEE and the Bank of France, and was therefore in a good position to work with AFRISTAT on the provision of technical assistance to countries, particularly in the compilation of financial accounts and balance sheet.
11. The Board expressed concern that training in statistics had not been given sufficient attention in the proposed programmed of ECA for this and the next biennia. Given the critical role of training in ensuring the desired level of statistical knowledge, in the face of high turnover of staff in national statistical offices, it was suggested that the ECA Statistics Team explore ways of working with the sub-regional training centres, through provision of scholarships and fellowships to assist students.
12. It is the expectation of the Board that ECA would bridge the gap in knowledge about the relative positions of countries, and identify types of intervention that would be required for interested development partners to support. There are a variety of realities that need to be sorted out. ECA would classify countries by the different levels of achievement in statistical development, what their needs are and draw up a programme. This type of information would help streamline donor support and avoid duplication.
13. ECA also mentioned the need for countries to send their annual report of activities to ECA according to the recommendations of CODI II.

Briefing on the follow up of first meeting of ABSA and FASDEV

The first meeting of the Advisory Board for Statistics in Africa (ABSA) was held in the United Nations Conference Center on 10-11 May 2004. The meeting reviewed and gave recommendations on the following documents.

1. Strategic framework for Statistics in Africa
2. Statistics at ECA: A Framework for action.

The status of the 11 recommendations that came out of the discussion on these two documents were presented to give the participants a view of what has been done since ABSA I.

Similarly the follow up on the recommendations of the first meeting of Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV) was discussed and the status of the follow up reviewed.

Issues raised

1. The Board noted that actions taken on past recommendations were rather limited, and only a few of the recommendations were being addressed. In particular, the Forum on African Statistical Development (FASDEV) had brought together several of the development partners, and the goal was to formulate a Reference Regional Strategy Framework, to guide statistical development in the region. Several countries were considering statistical master plans, following guidelines developed by PARIS21, and technical support had been provided to francophone countries through training organized by PARIS21.
2. On representation of African Countries in international fora, it was observed that ECA had not managed to convene any meeting to formulate the regional position that would be presented. Not only was there no regional input to the 36th Statistical Commission (in March 2005), but also, ECA was not represented.
3. The Board noted with appreciation the support of UNSD, PARIS21, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the United Kingdom Department for International Development, enabling some Directors of NSOs to attend the Statistical Commission session in New York. Other recommendations of the Board that had not had any successful follow up include:
 - The augmenting the small number of staff assigned to the Statistics teams;
 - Extending the scope of work to include MDG and NEPAD indicators, and information society statistics;
 - Assisting countries to develop socio-economic databases;
 - The need for a comprehensive plan for advocacy for statistics;
 - Cooperating with statistical training centres, to make training programme more relevant for emerging issues and provide training materials;
 - Changing of the name of the team responsible for statistics.
4. As the way forward, it was proposed to have a Stats-Com Africa to precede the Statistical Commission session each year. This should provide a forum for Africa to prepare a common position going into the main Statistical Commission Session.

ABSA Membership

5. The Board was informed that the two year term of members had expired and therefore there was need to consider membership for the next two-year term. The context for the selection of members was as follows:
 - The term of members is renewable
 - All board members should not be changed at the same time for this will create a problem in maintaining continuity of the work.,
 - Some members had never attended any meeting
 - The criteria for which some members were included on the Board were no more met (such as membership on Statistical Commission Bureau, Chair of the AFRISTAT)
 - Other considerations were gender balance and language representation.
 - ECA should do the reshuffling and communicate the new composition to members by end of May 2005.
6. The Board gave ECA the authority to review the membership of the board and make the necessary changes, according to the following principles:

- Replace on member countries that have failed to participate actively on the Board;
 - Replace those members who no longer meet the condition(s) for which they were initially chosen
 - Ensure gender balance and language representation.
 - It was also suggested that users of statistics services be considered for the board.
7. Morocco expressed interest in being on the Board.
8. The Board reaffirmed the importance of maintaining users on the Board, and asked that users that failed to participate in the Board sessions should be replaced with users from other countries.

Briefing on the 2010 round on population and housing censuses

The Secretariat provided an overview of the preparations of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, reporting that expert groups and technical subgroups had been formed by the United Nations Statistics Division to contribute to the review of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*. The membership of these groups and representation of African countries on the these groups were also highlighted. .

Issues raised

1. The Board considered the importance of the population census in the statistical work of national statistical offices, noting in particular the applications in poverty mapping (combined with living standards survey and related data sets).
2. Several of members of the Board noted with concern the Statistical Commission's report indicating that ECA had reported that it was not involved in any census related activities, and were encouraged by the effort made by the Statistics Team to derive from the United Nations global census programmes activities that were directly pertinent to countries in Africa.
3. The Board felt that ECA Statistics Team needed to be more directly involved in preparations for the 2010 Round of censuses, already under way and its 2006-2007 programme of work should therefore have activities related to census planning and programming. Specifically, the Board proposed that:
 - The Statistics team prepare as input into the review process, a synthesis of the African countries' experiences in the last round of censuses, highlighting best practices, lessons learnt from experiences that were not so successful, and specific requirements;
 - The information for this report, should be collected through the sub-regional organizations (based on a well designed form for the purpose of collecting this information); and directly from those countries that are not members of any of the sub-regional groupings;
 - A technical group should be convened to produce a consensus document to contribute to the review process (membership would include African countries represented on the UNSD expert group and technical subgroups);

- These activities should be completed in good time, before the expert group meeting which is scheduled for 22-26 August 2005.
4. The Population Census activities in the region should be coordinated with other partners, such as UNFPA/CST, sub-regional organizations,
 5. The Board emphasized the crucial importance of dissemination in the whole process of census taking. It was no more appropriate to produce only tables from the census results, but rather for effective use of resources census authorities should aim for wide distribution of information. The importance of Mapping was emphasized, as was the quality of Census Data. There was need to use the opportunity offered by GIS to map out the census results.
 6. The 2006-2007 work programme of the ECA Statistics team should include dissemination of census results
 7. Some members of the Board stated that membership of the expert and technical groups were not balanced, and did not reflect the scope of experiences in the countries.
 8. The Board urged the Statistics Team to be more proactive and strategic in its programming orientation, aiming for impact and visibility rather than keeping to its old programmes.
 9. On ECA's approach to programming, the Board was of the view that while financial considerations were relevant, the Statistics Team may be unduly constrained in its conceptualisation of what was essential for statistical development in Africa.
 10. The Team should be guided by the statistical needs and requirements of the region and prioritisation of activities that could lead to substitution of some previous activities. It was also possible that extra-budgetary funds could be obtained when the need has been well demonstrated.

African Statistical Association

The Board agreed that the African Statistical Association that existed in the early nineties should be revived, and a provisional committee comprising Egypt, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, AFRISTAT and ECA, was set up to work on the status and take stock of the previous association.

Other business

Recognition was given to Professor Ben Kiryegeera, from Uganda, a board member of ABSA, for the prestigious international Mahalonabis prize, granted by the Indian government for his work on statistical development in Africa. Professor Ben Price, from Indian, granted the award.

Conclusions and Recommendations of ABSA 2:

Taking note of the importance of statistics in monitoring of government programmes in the context of PRSPs, MDGs and NEPAD, and the need for strengthening statistical institutions

to meet increasing demand for data at national, regional and global levels, the Board made the following recommendations:

1. Reiterate the previous recommendations to put Statistics at higher level of hierarchy and importance, with sub region sections according to Managing for Development Results principles.
2. ECA should be strengthened to enable it to be proactive and provide leadership in statistical activities in Africa
3. Improve the collaboration and effective coordination among stakeholders in statistics development in Africa
4. There should be greater emphasis on the job training approach in ECA technical assistance programme
5. To have the Census 2010 incorporated in the work programme 2006-2007 and ensure that the work is done within the timeframe provided by UNSD
6. ECA should convene a meeting to formulate the African regional position on the Census 2010 before August 2005
7. To reconsider the membership of African countries in the various working groups of the Census 2010 and organize a regional meeting
8. To reconstitute the membership of ABSA taking into account the terms of reference and preservation of memory
9. ECA should work with regard to the issue of training, in collaboration with training centers to overcome the large staff turnover in the NSOs.
10. ECA should take stock on the existing best practices in National Accounts and share among countries
11. Countries and STCs should report on their activities as suggested at CODI 2 to allow ECA to be up to date on the statistical status of the continent
12. ECA should be represented at international fora to provide regional position
13. Member countries are urged to ensure that ABSA recommendations are taken on board by CODI for transmission to council of Ministers for decisions
14. The Board agreed on the revival of the African Statistical Association, and elected a provisional committee including Afristat, Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Uganda and ECA, to work on the status and take stock of the previous association.

**ADVISORY BOARD ON STATISTICS IN AFRICA
ABSA 2**

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Addis Ababa, 25 April 2005

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