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THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON AFRICAN STATISTICAL  
DEVELOPMENT (CASD) AND ITS SUB-COMMITTEES:  
MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS AND SELECTED ISSUES

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. It should be recalled that at the time of the establishment of the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development (CASD) in March 1992, it was recognized that coordination is extremely crucial to the success of technical cooperation in statistical programmes in Africa. It was also recognized that such coordination should be extended to the country level, for it is only by supporting national programmes and by giving due cognizance to priorities of countries that international efforts can be translated into concrete development activities.

2. The main objective of the CASD is to coordinate and direct efforts being made to revitalize, rehabilitate and develop the African statistical network and to monitor the overall implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s. To achieve that objective, the Committee felt it necessary to create within itself four Sub-committees to address specific issues with a view to ensuring smooth development of African national statistical systems. The Secretariat for the CASD is located at the ECA Statistics Division, following the decision of the first Inter-Agency meeting that the focal point for intellectual leadership in the work of all the Sub-committees should remain in ECA.

3. The present paper is meant to report to the Conference of African Planners, Statisticians, Population and Information Specialists, on major tasks achieved so far by the CASD through its secretariat and its four Sub-committees, and to place before the Conference some of the selected issues discussed during the last meetings of CASD concerning mainly the necessary steps to be taken to increase the impact of CASD activities in the future.

## II. MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF CASD

4. Before talking about the main achievements of CASD, it is perhaps appropriate to recall its overall objective as agreed during its second meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya on 25 and 26 November, 1992. It was decided during that meeting that "the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development shall:

- conduct regular review of the overall progress made by African countries in the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s;
- set up mechanisms for the continuous exchange of information among all bilateral and multilateral agencies;
- identify specific themes on which particular technical assistance effort should be made by donors, and consequently propose lines of action to these donors;
- conduct regular evaluation of its own activities."

5. It was envisaged that the above objectives should be achieved through activities to be undertaken by both the Secretariat of CASD and the four CASD Sub-committees. Three years on, and it is the intention of the ECA Statistics Division to report to the present session of the Conference of African Planners, Statisticians, Population and Information Specialists, on its own achievements as the Secretariat of CASD and on those of the CASD Sub-committees.

### Achievements by the CASD Secretariat

6. The CASD Secretariat has been very active in setting up the necessary arrangements for the launching of the CASD activities. These include the organization of Committee meetings and the

elaboration of its terms of reference and those of its four Sub-committees.

7. The CASD Secretariat also participated in the preparation of two important documents to be used as framework by the African countries in their process of implementing the Addis Ababa Plan of Action. The first document was the Guidelines for Needs Assessment and Strategy Development (NASD) which was drawn up on the basis of two drafts, one prepared by ECA/ILO and the other by the World Bank, as well as from the Kenya experience. The aim of the document was to assist countries in ascertaining their statistical needs and in formulating statistical development plans and work programme budgets within the framework of the Strategy for the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action.

8. The second document was the Guidelines for Monitoring Statistical Development. It should be recalled that during the second meeting of CASD, preliminary thoughts were revealed on the issue, and participants made comments and suggestions on which indicators of statistical development should be used and how these indicators should be developed. The draft of the document was prepared and later presented to the third meeting of the CASD, 6 - 7 July 1993. On the basis of the recommendations of that meeting, the draft document was translated into French, and both the English and the French versions of the document were despatched to all the Directors of African statistical offices for their comments, suggestions and amendments. The document was then revised in the light of the comments/suggestions, etc. received. The document was published under the title: "Framework for Monitoring Statistical Development in Africa", and disseminated by the CASD Secretariat in May/June, 1995.

9. Another area where the CASD Secretariat has been very active is the celebration of the African Statistics Day. It should be recalled that the Addis Ababa Plan of Action strongly recommended that African

governments "adopt the 18th of November as African Statistics Day in order to increase public awareness for the important role which statistics play in all aspects of social and economic life". For the celebration, the CASD Secretariat annually i) chooses a theme emphasizing the importance of statistics, ii) prepares Press release which is sent well in advance of the Day to all directors of African statistical offices, together with sufficient copies of poster for exhibition in the countries.

10. Also, the last joint meeting of the Sub-committees on Training and on Organization and Management of National Statistical Systems, held on 18 March, 1994 in Addis Ababa, drew up a ten-point action plan and gave the leadership role for Action 4: Directors opinion poll, to the CASD Secretariat. The objective of that action was to survey directors of national statistical offices in order to find out: i) their opinions on the quantity, quality and relevance of training available to them to meet their training needs; and ii) the organizational relationships between various parts of the national statistical systems. The survey was undertaken in the form of questionnaire sent in July/August 1994 to all the directors of African statistical offices. Although the response rate was low, a report on Pilot Analysis of the Regional Survey of Statistical Organization and Training, 1994 was presented to the CASD Sub-committee on Organization and Management of National Statistical Systems held in Addis Ababa on 25 May, 1995. Participants at that meeting felt that although the number of replies received by that time could not be considered statistically significant, the report met the terms of reference of the study, for those countries which had responded.

11. With the limited resource at its disposal, the CASD Secretariat has managed, to undertake the above-mentioned activities. Unfortunately, some activities could not be undertaken due to the lack of both human and financial resources. For example, it was not possible to organize the biennial meeting of Directors of Centres

participating in the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA), due to the termination of UNDP financial support to the regional component of the STPA project executed by the ECA Statistics Division. Furthermore, and for the same reasons, the CASD Secretariat has not yet been in the position of launching activities for the comprehensive monitoring of the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s.

### Achievements by the CASD Sub-committees

#### Sub-committee on Training

12. Ten actions have been identified as means to achieve the overall objective assigned to the Sub-committee, and for each of these actions, task forces were set up to undertake and monitor the activities. The ten actions are:

1. Training needs study
2. Survey of training schools
3. Survey of aid for training
4. Directors opinion poll
5. Subsidiarity as applied to statistical training
6. Study of contracts of association
7. Coordination with main CASD and other Sub-committees
8. Methods and tools
9. Compendium of statistical training
10. Dissemination of course information

- Action 1: Needs assessment and training plans

The objective is to use statistical needs assessments and work programmes in the most effective manner in order to produce training strategies and training plans.

13. Under this action the following two documents have been prepared:

- . "Focusing Statistical Training in Africa" by Mark Woodward draft report January 1995.
- . "Statistical Needs Assessment and Planning - A Review of Approaches and Current Practices" by Mitik Beyenne for the World Bank: draft report January 1995.

14. These documents were commissioned by the Action 1 Task Force set up by the Sub-committees on Training and on Organization and Management of National Statistical Systems. Having realized that more information on the subject was required than could be provided by desk studies, the United Kingdom overseas Development Administration, and the World Bank funded the two consultancy assignments.

15. The report on "Statistical Needs Assessments and Planning" was presented to and discussed at the third meeting of the Sub-committee on Organization and Management of National Statistical Systems, and the fifth meeting of the CASD.

16. Both documents have been revised to reflect the comments and suggestions made. The revised versions were presented to the joint meeting of the Sub-committees on Training and on Organization and Management of National Statistical Systems held in Paris from 15 - 17 January 1996. Subsequently, they were discussed during the sixth meeting of the CASD in Addis Ababa last weekend, i.e. 8 and 9 March.

- Action 2: Survey of training schools

Objective: to analyze the constraints faced by training schools and suggest solutions



Output: A survey of existing training systems and schools, detailing the number of students at each level of training, constraints, etc.

No output has yet been achieved.

- Action 3: Survey of aid for training

Objective: to bring together in one report information on external assistance to statistical training.

Output: A compendium of present donor assistance to training for African statisticians and a list of key contacts.

17. A questionnaire was sent out to donor agencies; the consolidated responses were presented to the Sub-committee on Training during its third meeting in Luxembourg on 6 and 7 February 1995.

18. That meeting confirmed that although the target for the survey had always been external donor agencies (rather than national statistical services) there has, in addition, been a wish to quantify the assistance available to African statistical training.

- Action 4: Directors opinion poll

Objective: To survey directors of national statistical institutes in order to find out their opinions of the quantity, quality and relevance of training available to them to meet their training needs.

Output: A report summarising the views of directors, with a summary showing the unsatisfied demand.

19. A Report on Pilot Analysis of the Regional Survey of Statistical Organization and Training, 1994, was presented to the third meeting of the Sub-committee on Organization and Management of National Statistical Systems and subsequently to the CASD in May 1995.

20. Among other things, the meetings were informed that a questionnaire was sent out in July/August 1994 to all ECA member States except Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda and Somalia due to the civil strife in those countries at the time. By the end of March 1995, 14 out of 49 countries had responded. On the recommendation of the CASD, the questionnaire was sent out again to the non-respondent countries. A total of 23 countries responded (46 per cent) and a revised version of the report is now available.

- Action 5: Subsidiarity as applied to statistical training

Objective: To compare training carried out at different geographical locations (national, regional, etc.) and different sectoral levels, drawing on Pan-African experiences.

21. Further investigation is needed for the achievement of this output.

- Action 6: Contracts of association

Objective: to study formal and informal contracts of association for statistical training institutions and show the costs, advantages and disadvantages of such contracts for each of the partners.

A comprehensive paper has been prepared.

- Action 7: Coordination with main CASD and its Sub-committees

Objective: Coordination of training related activities between countries, training centres and donors.

Output: Better coordination and understanding.

- Action 8: Methods and tools

Objective: to look at examples of existing ways of delivering training at a variety of levels in order to discover the best combination of tools and methods.

Output: A report of best practices.

No attempt has yet been achieved.

- Action 9: Compendium of statistical training

Objective: to bring together in one volume information on training which is relevant to staff of national statistical systems.

Output: A comprehensive report.

- Action 10: Dissemination of course information

22. A companion to Action 9, the aim is to provide on a regular basis, reliable and timely information on training opportunities in a most- cost effective manner.

No final output has yet been achieved.

b) Sub-committee on Organization and Management of National Statistical Systems

23. Since its establishment, the Sub-committee on Organization and Management of National Statistical Systems has focused on the promotion of the Needs Assessment and Strategy Development (NASD) exercise in African countries, since that was the first activity countries were expected to undertake in implementing the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa.

24. In summary, the objective of the NASD are to ascertain:

- (a) What data have to date been made available to users;
- (b) What data have been used in the past;
- (c) What are the data gaps;
- (d) How data gaps have constrained planning, policy making and other work;
- (e) What are the current and future data needs of the primary users, and what priorities are to be attached to these, and to what extent do users value timeliness, completeness of coverage, accuracy and other aspects of statistical quality relative to the cost of providing such quality.
- (f) What will be the statistical programme to satisfy these requirements and what changes will be required to the existing programme (e.g. cancellation of certain collections, revisions of others, improved use of existing sources, introduction of new collections, etc.);
- (g) What institutional and legislative reforms are required to improve the effectiveness of the statistical system.

25. The Sub-Committee identified three sub-activities as priority actions to be undertaken in that respect. These are:

- Study on actual practices and experiences of countries initiating the NASD exercise;

- Study of the relationship between central statistical offices and other elements of the national statistical system; and
- Study on data dissemination policy in the African countries.

26. The first study has been undertaken by the World Bank in connection with Action 1 of the Sub-committee on Training; the second was conducted by the CASD Secretariat in connection with Action 4 of the Sub-committee on Training . It only remains the third study relating to data dissemination policy, which will be promoted by the World Bank with contributions from the Sub-committee on Data Processing.

c) Sub-committee on Research, Methods and Standards

27. So far the Sub-committee has conducted a Survey among national statistical offices/agencies on statistical research activities in the African countries. The findings of that survey were presented to the Sub-committee at its second meeting held on 25 May, 1995. It was noted that the response rate of the survey questionnaires was low and therefore did not give a strong basis for the Sub-committee to define a strategy or develop action programmes. The Sub-committee further noted that statistical research should be focused on the development needs and priorities of countries, and that these should first be identified. It was agreed that the report on the survey would be distributed to the six organizations/institutions and national statistical offices, including members of the Sub-committee.

28. The Sub-committee is also leading the Task Force on Action 3 regarding the "Survey of Aid for Training".

### Sub-committee on Data Processing

29. The Sub-committee has put emphasis on the conduct of the ECA biennial Survey of Statistical Data Processing Capacities, which is an important instrument in the establishment of a bench-mark situation, and could serve as a vital reference source. The 1993 Survey has been processed and disseminated in the form of:

- Directory of electronic data processing centres and experts in Africa;
- Inventory of computer software utilized for the statistical data processing in Africa.

30. Constructive comments on the draft 1995 questionnaire have been received. ECA is now in the process of finalizing the 1995 Directory of EDP capacity in Africa on the basis of the completed questionnaires received from the countries.

31. Due to the limited resources at its disposal, the Sub-committee agreed to concentrate its future activities around the ECA Survey. However, efforts will continue in the direction of exchange of country experience, creation of appropriate groups and focal points in the member States and in strengthening contacts through relevant fora.

### III. SELECTED ISSUES

#### 1. More involvement of African countries in CASD activities

32. The question of how to involve African countries in the work of CASD was asked in March, 1992 during the Inter-Agency meeting on the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s. Participants at that meeting felt that African statistical services should be represented in the Committee, as the major responsibility of implementing the Addis

Ababa Plan of Action is theirs. At that time, it was felt that by including members of the Bureau of the Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Population and Information Specialists in the Committee, African countries were adequately represented. The Committee then requested ECA to take into account the financial implications of the decision while preparing its submission for UNDP funding of the regional support to the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action under the Fifth Programming Cycle. Unfortunately, the project proposal submitted by the ECA was not approved for financing by UNDP, and it became difficult for the CASD Secretariat to secure funds to finance the participation of the members of the Bureau of the Conference in the CASD meetings.

33. For the first time, representatives of ten National statistical offices participated in the fifth meeting of the CASD, 25-26 May 1995. That was due to the fact that the meeting was held in connection with the first Joint Conference of the International Association for Official Statistics (IAOS) and the African Statistical Association (AFSA) and more importantly to the generous financial support of the World Bank, the IAOS and bilateral and multilateral agencies for the participation of most of the African delegates in the Conference. During that CASD meeting, it appeared that only few African national statistical services are aware of the existence of CASD and its activities. The need was then expressed for more involvement of the national statistical services in the work of the CASD and its Sub-committees in order to better identify national statistical needs, priorities and improve coordination.

34. The present Statistics Committee may wish to make comments and suggestions which may help to involve more effectively African countries in CASD activities.

2. Strengthening of CASD Secretariat

35. It should be recalled that after having unanimously agreed that the Secretariat for the CASD be located at ECA, the participants at the first Inter-Agency meeting called for an effective and strengthened secretariat. This call was made in recognition of the fact that, the only way the Coordinating Committee could function effectively was through an efficient secretariat. At that time, it was the hope that the project proposal which had been submitted to UNDP for support for the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action during the UNDP fifth programming cycle would be approved. Unfortunately that has not been the case, and since then it has become difficult for the ECA Statistics Division to efficiently play its role as the Secretariat of CASD, given the limited resource in its disposal within the ECA regular budget.

36. The issue was discussed during the fifth meeting of the CASD in May, 1995. The participants indicated that the "CASD Secretariat could not perform its duties at the level of efficiency expected of it as it was hamstrung by lack of adequate resources ..... This has had serious effects on its coordination role. There was urgent need for establishing the enabling environment for the Secretariat to function more efficiently."

37. The Statistics Committee may wish to make suggestions which may help in strengthening the Secretariat of CASD.

3. Mobilization of resources for CASD activities and for statistical development in Africa

38. Another issue of concern is the urgent need to look into various possibilities for the mobilization of adequate resources to finance CASD activities for the effective coordination of statistical development at the regional level in Africa. It should be recalled



that the issue was intensively discussed during the fourth meeting of the CASD in March 1994, on the basis of a document by the Secretariat of CASD on possible means of mobilizing resources for statistical development in Africa at national, regional and global levels. It was noted that, while the mobilization of financial resources for statistical activities was an easy task in the 1960s, the situation was quite different in the 1990s due to the world economic crisis and the resulting changes in the modalities of partnership in development. In conclusion, that meeting requested the CASD Secretariat to appoint a consultant to study the issue more deeply. Unfortunately, sufficient resources were not available to the ECA Statistics Division to finance such a consultancy. None the less, there is urgent need to look into various possibilities of mobilizing adequate resources to support coordination activities by the CASD Secretariat and its Sub-committees.

39. The Statistics Committee may wish to discuss this issue with a view helping the CASD in its endeavour to find ways and means of mobilizing resources for statistical development in the African region.

#### 4. The future of CASD and its Sub-committees

40. As stated in the introduction to this paper, the mandate of the CASD is to coordinate and direct efforts to revitalize and develop the infrastructures of the African statistical systems. On the basis of that mandate, the need for CASD to continue for some time into the future is evident.

41. The question of the future of the CASD was raised and discussed during its fifth meeting in May, 1995. Some participants expressed doubts as to whether the laudable regional goals set out in the Strategy for the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s were being achieved,

and whether the CASD was really doing what it was set up to do. Participants stated that there is need to restructure the CASD; some of them even mooted the idea of replacing the present four CASD Sub-committees by a CASD Technical Sub-committee which could set up task forces to deal with specific and cross-cutting issues and activities in order to have real impact at the national level. It was pointed out that the CASD meetings are nearly always planned to run parallel to some major meetings due to resource constraints and that such arrangements hardly allows adequate time for proper in-depth discussion of issues.

42. As regards the restructuring of the CASD, the view was expressed at the fifth CASD meeting that any proposal for a change in the present structure should be preceded by an assessment of the achievements and the objectives of the Committee. It was decided that the CASD Secretariat, in cooperation with the World Bank, Statistics Sweden, Statistical Office of the European Union (EUROSTAT), Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics, Makerere University (ISAE), International Programs Center, United States Bureau of the Census (IPC), Observatoire économique et statistique d'Afrique Subsaharienne (AFRISTAT), United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD), etc., should undertake an evaluation of the CASD and its Sub-committees. At the time of the preparation of the present paper, the CASD Secretariat has been making necessary contacts with the above listed agencies/institutes in order to get an harmonized view on how best to undertake such an evaluation.

43. Any comments and suggestions from the present Statistics Committee regarding the planned evaluation of the CASD will help in performing this task. The Statistics Committee may also wish to make suggestions with regard to the future activities of the CASD in order to enable the Committee achieve its objectives.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

44. The mandate given by the first Inter-Agency meeting on the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action, to the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development (CASD), was to coordinate and monitor the overall implementation of that Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s.

45. From the highlights of the major achievements of the CASD Secretariat and its Sub-committees since March 1992, it would appear that much has to be done if the target of the year 2000 for the comprehensive development of the African national statistical systems should be met. These and other emerging issues need serious consideration in order to enable successful implementation of the CASD mandate.

46. The present Statistics Committee may wish to discuss on the selected issues described in this paper, and make recommendations for the benefit of an effective and successful implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s.