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Report of the Working Group on Development Indicators

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Contents

	Page
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Activities of the Group.....	1
2.1. Elaboration of the Terms of Reference of the Group.....	1
2.2. Meetings and workshops.....	2
2.3. Online discussion forum.....	3
2.4. Other activities.....	3
3. Challenges.....	4
3.1. Discrepancies.....	4
3.2. Data gaps.....	5
4. Way forward.....	6

Introduction

On progress towards the Millennium Development Goals(MDGs), it is now admitted that African countries will not meet some of the MDGs despite efforts made in recent years. The reasons for this include the recent financial crisis, the slow pace of economic growth and mainly, climate change since most, if not all African countries, depend on agricultural products and raw materials for their development.

On the side of monitoring, countries have made efforts in conducting surveys and censuses and also in building and reinforcing their National Statistical Systems (NSSs) through the National Strategy on Development of Statistics (NSDS) in line with their Poverty-Reduction Strategy Programmes (PRSPs). However, some improvements are still needed for perfecting national reporting systems as well as for covering all indicators through time.

The Working Group on MDGs was established by StatCom-Africa I in order to tackle the challenges that hamper the capacity of African countries to monitor and evaluate progress made towards the MDGs. These challenges include: i) data discrepancies between national and international organizations; ii) data gaps; iii) methodological issues; iv) capacity building; and v) reporting systems.

The Group committed itself to conduct the following activities:

1. To draft Terms of Reference of the group;
2. To hold one annual meeting of the group;
3. To support some members to attend Inter-Agency and Expert Group(IAEG) and other international meetings on the MDGs; and
4. To set up an online discussion forum.

The current report takes stock of the implementation of activities planned for by the Group since StatCom I and, further, gives information on the activities planned for the future.

Activities of the Group

Drafting of the Terms of Reference of the Group

To address the challenges faced by African countries, the Working Group has drafted terms of reference (ToRs) that mandate it to:

- Examine progress, identify problems, and propose solutions to existing and emerging issues on measuring progress towards development initiatives including the MDGs;
- Promote exchange of experiences, peer learning, technical cooperation, and data sharing among African countries and institutions on the MDGs;
- Advise StatCom-Africa on the establishment of methodologies, norms and standards at the international level and the adoption of these internationally-agreed methodologies, norms and standards and practices in the production and use of statistical information on MDGs;
- Advocate for resource mobilization and technical cooperation in support of national efforts to monitor the MDGs;

- Ensure the dissemination of the results of its work to National Statistical Offices (NSOs), sub-regional, regional, international organizations and any other user; and
- Recommend studies that may be required to address issues pertaining to the monitoring of the MDGs.

In order to fulfill this mandate, the Working Group should examine:

- Current data sources (e.g., census, survey or administrative system);
- Sustainability of data production (e.g., periodicity of censuses, surveys);
- Data quality issues such as its coverage and disaggregation level;
- The use of alternative data sources and the feasibility of using estimation or imputation methodologies;
- Problems posed by the overall reporting mechanism on the MDGs;
- Lack of data on a number of indicators;
- Discrepancies between country-published data and those generated by international organizations;
- Inadequacy of mechanisms for validation with NSOs;
- Estimates made by international organizations for missing country data;
- Lack of coordination among statistical producers and users within - countries, between and among countries and international organizations;
- Lack of harmonization of concepts, methodologies and standards;
- Lack of sustainability of data production for MDG indicators; and
- NSS lack of human and financial resources which undermines their capacity to generate, process, package and disseminate MDG statistical indicators.

Moreover, the ToRs indicate the modalities of electing the bureau of the Group and of meeting in-between StatCom meetings.

Copies of ToRs are available on the Working Group's Forum.

Meetings and workshops

The Group was set up in a context where the ACS was newly-established; consequently, due to financial constraints, the Group has been unable to hold the formal annual meeting.

The IAEG on MDGs meets every six months in order to deal with issues pertaining to monitoring of the MDGs at the Global level. ECA has ensured that IAEG meetings are attended, at least, by four African countries.

Various IAEG meetings have recognized data discrepancies between national and international estimates and data gaps and concluded on the need for harmonizing concepts and definitions as well as the need for disseminating manuals or handbooks on the latter. In this regard, the IAEG, of which ACS is a full member, has started the process for reviewing the handbook on MDGs and will finalize it by March 2010.

The IAEG recommended that the United Nations Regional Commissions (RCs) should review the issue of discrepancies between national and international estimates in close collaboration

with UNSD and undertake consultations with their respective member States in order to come up with a regional contribution to the global report on the issue.

In line with this recommendation, ACS and UNSD co-organised, in collaboration with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) secretariat, a *Workshop on Coordination of Reporting Mechanisms and Data Discrepancies in MDG Monitoring*, from 05 to 08 May 2008, in Kampala, Uganda.

The workshop was meant to identify potential sources of discrepancy between national and international data sources in MDG monitoring and to explore ways to reconcile them. In addition to SADC member States (14 countries), the workshop was also attended by representatives from Cameroon, Ghana and Uganda, and some international organizations including the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

Online discussion forum

ECA has launched an African Statistical Network Portal. Among various thematic areas, the Portal will support the discussion forum on MDGs. Members of the Working Group (see list in Annex), could register for the forum.

Other activities

In February 2009, ECA and ADB drafted a comprehensive Framework for improving MDG Data Quality, Availability and Reporting. The document makes a review of some African country experiences, proposes solutions and suggests a number of orientations to be followed and activities that the Group should conduct.

Under this framework were conducted *Case Studies on Assessment of Data Discrepancies between national and international sources and possible solutions in* six African countries namely Uganda and Ethiopia (by ACS), Burkina Faso and Senegal (by Afristat), Liberia (by UNSD, DFID and ACS) and Tanzania (by UNSD and DFID). Data gaps and data discrepancies have some common characteristics: some indicators under Goals 5 and 6, Indicators under Goal 7 and Indicator 8.13 have serious data gaps and discrepancies in both countries. Pertinent recommendations (see the Report on the Assessment) are addressed to the principal stakeholders: (i) IAEG; (ii) Governments; (iii) NSOs and the NSS; (iv) United Nations agencies, excluding ACS/UNECA; and (v) ACS/UNECA.

In terms of strategy and programme for regional-global statistical conciliation on MDGs, ECA, with the collaboration of regional partners, has taken a number of initiatives that would form a framework for future work in this regard. These include the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA) and the Joint Regional Publications and Databases Working Group of the African Statistical Coordination Committee (ASCC).

- ***The Statistical Training Programme for Africa:*** Recognizing the critical importance of statistical training for the production of quality statistics, a working group led by ECA/ACBF was set up to propose a strategic programme on human resources and

training in statistics. Building on the proposal presented to the last coordination meeting, the ACS is finalizing a draft of the detailed proposal on the STPA. The key elements of the programme are: support to Regional Statistical Training Centres, establishment/support for In-Service Training Centres as recommended by the RRSF and the Induction-Tutorage-Mentoring Facility. This programme can be used to strengthen the capacity of African countries in their quest to produce and disseminate quality statistics for MDG monitoring.

- ***The African Group on Statistical Training and Human Resources (AGROST)***. The meeting on the coordination of statistical training activities and initiatives in Africa that took place alongside the 19th meeting of the AFRISTAT Steering Committee on 13 April 2009, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, suggested that existing groups on statistical training in Africa should be replaced by a single Group under the aegis of StatCom-Africa. The main objective of AGROST is to ensure the coordination of activities and initiatives in support of statistical training and human resources development in Africa. This coordination will take place at three different levels, namely: ongoing activities and initiatives, project planning, as well as alignment of Technical and Financial Partner support to statistical training in Africa. The first meeting of AGROST was held in Bujumbura, in June 2009.
- ***The Joint regional publications and databases Working Group of the ASCC***: In order to minimize duplication of efforts and dissemination of conflicting data on African countries, it was agreed that a working group on databases and joint statistical publications led by AfDB/ECA should be set up to harmonize regional statistical databases and publications. The Working Group has envisaged developing a regional database including an MDG component. The joint African Statistical Yearbook whose first publication has been issued in 2009, has a section on MDGs.

Challenges

The main challenges in monitoring the MDGs in Africa are the data discrepancies and gaps and also the reporting system. The case studies in six African countries have brought out the following issues:

Discrepancies

Discrepancies between national and international data sources might emerge from a number of factors including the following:

- ***Definitions and specifications***: Definitions must be clear so that the terms used do not give rise to different interpretations in different countries.
- ***Inadequacy of estimates from sample surveys***: Some survey estimates may not be accurate enough to serve a useful purpose for international comparisons or for monitoring progress towards MDGs. Indeed, survey estimates may be far from useful for comparison for such reasons as large sampling and non-sampling errors, lack of

comparability of methodology over time, poor coverage and changes in study populations.

- ***Inadequacy of coverage:*** MDG indicators can have more credible estimates from sample surveys or from administrative records only when the former are well designed and implemented and the latter ensure full coverage and good quality. Unfortunately, good sample surveys or records are often too expensive for most countries and the occurrence is three to five years.
- ***The reference Year:*** The reference period for administrative statistics is often the financial year, and adjustments may then have to be made to get estimates for a calendar year.
- ***Differences in methodology:*** It is also possible for study populations and questionnaires used in one survey to be different from those in another, and the survey design, including the estimation technique, may also change over time for valid reasons. In addition, the nature of parameters may also change over time, and that is also evidenced in the MDG indicators revised since 2007. Hence, discrepancies may arise over time both within countries and between estimates of international agencies that may also find it proper to change their methods and data processing procedures over time.
- ***Differences in population estimates:*** Several MDG indicators require the use of population estimates for inter-census periods, and these are invariably made using various assumptions about population growth based on further assumptions regarding trends in birth rate, death rate and net migration.
- ***Adjustments in the MDG framework*** International institutions have provided estimates in cases when countries had failed to report indicators. This creates huge discrepancies between national and international estimates.

Data gaps

Among several factors that are contributing to the observed data gaps, special attention should be paid to the following as far as the African region is concerned:

- ***Frequency of the updates:*** A close examination of the two country case studies shows that only 30 indicators have been updated in the UNSD database up to April 2008. Of these, 28 were updated in August 2007 or earlier, and only two were updated early in 2008. Further, out of the 30 indicators updated so far, only four have data for 2006, and the rest have data for years before 2006.
- ***Periodicity of sample surveys:*** In the absence of a functional NSS, several indicators are dependent on sample surveys and such surveys are usually carried out every three to five years so that inter-survey and inter-census periods tend to lead to data gaps. Within countries, the best data source for MDGs is the census population but its occurrence is too long to facilitate the year-to-year monitoring.

- **National priorities:** There may have been lack of in-country capacity to collect data on account of cost, and some indicators like CO₂ emission and ozone depletion in Goal 7 may not be quite in line with national priorities in many African countries.

Way forward

In its work programme 2010-2011, ACS planned to produce a *Handbook on the derivation of development indicators from population censuses and household surveys*. One expert Group meeting and one workshop will be organized in order to provide inputs to this task. In addition, a series of activities have been planned in order to enhance member States' capacity to produce and disseminate indicators on development. These activities include sub-regional and regional expert group meetings and workshops.

In partnership with UNSD and other Regional Commissions, ECA will implement a Development Account Project (DAP). The expected accomplishments of this DAP are:

EA1: Improved and increased national and regional MDGs statistical production and use, in accordance to both international standards and regional benchmarks, through regional collaborative practices.

EA2: Decreased statistical discrepancies in MDG indicators among national, regional and international sources, advancing in a process of statistical conciliation at the national level (among national agencies), and at the international level (with other countries in the region and with international agencies) both facilitated by the regional statistical bodies.

EA3: Strengthened network of MDG statistical and reporting experts and practitioners at the national level and at the regional level, through increased interchange of experiences, best practices and methodologies.

To achieve these goals, the following activities will be conducted: i) carrying out and updating a comparison of data series; ii) technical assistance in countries to help them in building and strengthening statistical and institutional capacities; iii) one regional capacity building workshop; iv) producing and disseminating documents and publications; v) promoting and strengthening the development of national inter-institutional MDG working groups; vi) implementing and regularly updating regional MDG indicator databases.

The Working Group will also help African countries to develop national databases that would feed the regional system.

Annex1: List of members of the Working Group on Development Indicators

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