

StatCom7 ends with call on Africa to prioritize digitalizing continent's statistical systems

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, October 15, 2020 (ECA) - The Seventh Session of the Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom7) ended Thursday with high-level participants emphasizing the importance of digitizing the continent's statistical systems; use of big data; data and statistics coordination; and political will for effective statistics development in Africa.

The three-day meeting saw participants in the virtual meeting discuss ways to devise innovative statistical solutions to strengthen national statistical systems to keep decision-makers informed of economic, social and environmental developments in real time.

Oliver Chinganya, Director of the Africa Statistics Centre (ACS) at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), said statistical coordination and partnership was crucial to ensure statistics are holistically produced by national systems in an efficient way in line with common and harmonized standards, norms and principles.

“With COVID-19 impact, building back better for resilient and agile national statistical systems requires us to transform by digitalizing our statistical systems,” said Mr. Chinganya, adding there was an urgent need for a legal framework to build international trust.

He encouraged coordination of donors at national level to avoid duplication, a waste of resources, incoherent approaches and poorly integrated programmes.

Chair of the Bureau of StatCom Africa, Ms. Albina Chuwa, who is also the Director General of Tanzania's National Bureau for Statistics, emphasized the need for political will, in particular she called on governments to provide enough budgetary support to NSOs to ensure they are modernized to meet the continent's data needs for evidence-based decision-making.

“We will not achieve the ideals of Agenda 2030 or Agenda 2063 if we lack political will,” she said, adding member States should always ensure Africa is represented at international fora where critical decisions that can impact the continent are taken.

Recommendations

Taking note of ongoing statistical capacity development at national, sub-regional and continental levels in the context of sustainable development and COVID-19 impact, participants approved the creation of the African group on transformation and

modernization of official statistics, and requested the ECA to undertake its operationalization.

They called on member States to use statistical development indicators on an annual basis to measure their statistical development progress; pan-African organizations and partners to work in close collaboration and foster synergies to support African countries, in particular those with the lowest levels of statistical development to mitigate the COVID-19; and countries were urged to strengthen integration between geospatial information systems and other statistical systems.

On sustainable development goal indicators, countries were urged to continue aligning their national development plans and budgeting processes with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and international frameworks.

Regional economic communities and United Nations sub-regions were urged to synergize their collaboration and partnership to accelerate efforts to track progress towards fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda.

Participants acknowledged that population and housing census data were indispensable for effective development planning; for monitoring population, socioeconomic and environmental trends, policies and programmes; and for research and analysis of social and economic phenomena.

They called on member States to renew their commitment to the conduct of population and housing censuses during the 2020 round and asked, in particular, for technical assistance and advisory services for countries in conflict and post-conflict countries and also for those affected by COVID-19.

The participants further recommended the adoption of carefully planned and hybrid methods for censuses, including combinations of traditional and Internet-based data collection and registry-based censuses.

Noting its concern about the low level of political will to support the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, StatCom7 called for the establishment of a committee to explore ways of revamping the continental commitment to the APAI-CRVS.

Civil registration systems and the vital statistics that are generated must be strengthened as core components of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting agreed, adding the systems need to harness the potential of technologies, in particular mobile phones, which are now widely available.

Member States need to establish automated civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems that are based on the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda framework, the meeting agreed.

Noting the continuing work for the development of gender statistics on the continent and supporting other work priorities of the African programme on gender statistics, the meeting called on member States to support the development of gender-related administrative data.

StatCom-Africa member country representatives, National Statistics Office representatives and observers from national, sub-regional, regional and international organizations; NGOs; academia and research institutions; and the private sector attended the meeting held the theme; “Developing regional solutions to enhance the resilience of African national statistical systems to meet the need for data during the Decade of Action in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic”.

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