

The Seventh Meeting of the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development (CASD)

Opening Statement by

K. Y. Amoako

**UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the
Economic Commission for Africa**

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Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Members of the Coordinating
Committee on African Statistical Development,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to a new Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) - a re-energized and reformed ECA - and to the Seventh meeting of the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development (CASD), which, as you know, is the main technical body for coordinating African statistical activities. Your presence here is a demonstration of the continued interest and commitment of your respective countries and organizations to the promotion of development information on Africa and in particular to the development of data and statistics.

The renewal of ECA has entailed the reorientation of the Commission's work along strategic new directions, the main objective of which is to serve Africa better. The establishment of mutually beneficial and strategic alliances with partners has been an important part of the ECA renewal process. In this connection, your Committee has an important role to play in ensuring that its activities complement those of ECA particularly in fostering effective cooperation with partners and in promoting statistical development in Africa.

I would like to inform you that since your last meeting, ECA has, as part of the renewal process, put in place new programme structures. The focus areas include: facilitating economic and social policy analysis and implementation, ensuring food security and sustainable development, strengthening development management, harnessing information for development, and promotion of regional cooperation. Accordingly, five new managers have been put in place to direct the implementation of the work programmes.

The Development Information Services Division (DISD), which focuses on harnessing information for development is of immediate relevance to your committee. Statistical activities are basically geared towards producing relevant and accurate information for development purposes. The present arrangement which places statistics within DISD provides it with access to resources in the information technology area, as well as other functional areas in DISD. I would like to assure you that the programme of DISD and, therefore, the work of your Committee, has my full support.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The state of information development in Africa is characterised by lack of or poor quality of data, weak or inadequate telecommunication systems, lack of a critical mass of trained personnel, and laws and regulations that impede information flows. This is a very unsatisfactory state. It is for this reason that ECA attaches much importance to the strengthening of information capacities. Such efforts are being undertaken within the framework of the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), adopted by the ECA Conference of Ministers responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning in May 1996.

At the same time, the rehabilitation of Africa's statistical infrastructure has continued to be a priority area for ECA in order to assist in the development of sustainable national statistical systems. These activities are within the framework of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa together with the Strategy for its implementation. In this connection, ECA is serving as a catalyst for the development of Africa's statistical capacities and the promotion of electronic connectivity within the region and with the rest of the world. It is our hope that through connectivity, all African countries, and in particular their national statistical offices, will be linked to ECA and other international organizations, to enable speedier transfer of development information.

At the sub-regional level we are strengthening and rationalizing the sub-regional offices now called Sub-regional Development Centres (SRDCs). These centres will enhance the communications between the countries and ECA, and also operationalise ECA's role at the sub-regional level.

Regarding CASD, I have been informed that following evaluation of CASD activities, your Committee was restructured. The previous sub-committees on: training; organisation and management of national statistical systems; data processing; and research, methods and standards, have been abolished. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Conveners and Joint-Conveners of the Sub-committees, in particular the Statistical Office of the European Union, the United Kingdom Overseas Development Administration, Statistics Sweden, the World Bank, and the United Nations Statistics Division for their assistance and support to statistical development in Africa and for undertaking tasks based on action plans which were identified for the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action.

The work of the restructured CASD will now be driven by task forces. This, I believe, is a move in the right direction. I expect that with this new structure you will be able to achieve even more than you were able to achieve previously. Restructuring should be viewed as a continuing process to enable improvements to be made for cost effective and efficient implementation of the work at hand.

Over the years and for various reasons, the Secretariat of the CASD has not been able to play the leadership role it wanted to play in the coordination of African statistical development. It has sometimes found it difficult to implement activities requested by the Committee, and it has not always found it easy to participate in the meetings held outside the country of its location.

Difficulties could also be attributed to lack of financial resources to fund the activities of the Secretariat, and the lack of proper information flow between the Secretariat and CASD, and even among CASD members themselves, regarding statistical activities in Africa. In this connection, the ECA has sent a questionnaire to all member States to determine the status of statistical activities in Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to assure you that ECA, with its new vision, is already taking these concerns seriously as it performs its role as catalyst in driving forward the statistical agenda in Africa as a central issue of the information services for development. A comprehensive analysis of the strengths and weaknesses including the requisite skills mix available and required for the effective implementation of the new programme directives of the Commission were taken into account in arriving at the changes which have been introduced.

Let me assure you further that I am personally committed to do everything possible within available resources to facilitate the work of your Committee. I believe 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.

As partners with us in statistical development in Africa, it is my hope that we will continue to shoulder the challenges together and intensify our collaboration in assisting to improve data and statistics on Africa. In this connection, we welcome new proposals from you regarding the strengthening of statistical activities in Africa.

According to the provisional agenda for this meeting, you will be discussing three substantive issues: the Report to the CASD by the Secretariat; consideration of proposed task forces; and mobilisation of resources for the implementation of CASD activities. I hope that your deliberations will result in concrete proposals for the further development of statistics in Africa.

Before I conclude this statement, I would like to take this opportunity to once again express my gratitude and appreciation to you and to your countries and organizations for such valuable collaboration, cooperation and support to Africa's development.

I wish you every success in your work. I now declare open the Seventh meeting of the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development.

I thank you for your attention.

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