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**UNITED NATIONS
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SOUTHERN AFRICA OFFICE**

Regional Workshop on the Harmonization of Statistics
in Southern Africa

3 – 4 December 2009
Manzini, Swaziland

**REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE
HARMONISATION OF STATISTICS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA**

DRAFT REPORT

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AACB	Association of African Central Banks
AEC	African Economic Community
AfDB	African Development Bank
AGR	African Governance Report
AIDS	Acquired Immune deficiency Syndrome
ARIA	Assessing Regional Integration for Africa
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECA-SA	Economic Commission for Africa Southern Africa Office
ERA	Economic Report on Africa
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
ICE	Intergovernmental Committee of Experts
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NDPs	National Development Plans
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NSOs	National Statistical Offices
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
REDS	Regional Economic Development Strategy
RI	Regional Integration
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UN	United Nations

Introduction

At the core of any development effort is the need for governments and other key stakeholders to measure and benchmark progress towards regionally and internationally agreed development goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There are standard development indicators and targets set, as well as comparison tools developed for countries and regions to track progress. All the measurement tools and indicators would be meaningless without appropriate and reliable statistical data and information¹. Across Africa many subregions and indeed countries lack the very basic sources of statistical information flows that are critical in tracking development targets and outcomes and should have been available on an annual basis as well as down to the lowest administrative level.

It is noteworthy that many countries in the subregion face increasing challenges in the generation, analysis, usage and dissemination of statistics thus impairing decision making processes. There is also the problem of lack of comparability and credibility among data sets owing to different methodologies employed in data gathering. In order to address some of these challenges at the continental level, the United Nations African Centre for Statistics was established. Its overall objective is to strengthen capacities for statistical development at national, subregional and regional levels, including the promotion of the development of improved and integrated statistical databases in support of decision-making and policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation.

It is hoped that the African Centre for Statistics, will foster a community of practice that is well versed with generation, management and usage of statistics and can foster evidence-based policy-making. Despite these well-intentioned measures, a number of data-related and statistical challenges abound in many countries and regions. It is against this background that the Economic Commission for Africa Southern Africa office (ECA-SA) convened a Regional Workshop on the Harmonization of Statistics in Southern Africa.

Attendance

The Regional Workshop on the Harmonization of Statistics in Southern Africa was held in Manzini, Swaziland from 3-4 December 2009. A selected number of experts from National Statistical Offices (NSOs) across the subregion attended the meeting. Staff from the ECA-SA Secretariat as well as an official from the Southern African Regional Documentation Centre in Harare, Zimbabwe participated in the meetings. Names of participants and their institutional affiliation appear as Annex I.

Opening session and welcoming remarks (Agenda item 1)

Mr. Alfred Latigo, Senior Economic Affairs Officer of ECA-SA warmly welcomed participants to the workshop and thanked them for favourably responding to the invitation to the meeting. He extended special appreciation to Ms. Nelsiwe Dlamini, a Statistician from the NSO in Swaziland for officiating at the meeting.

¹ <http://www.dst.dk/upload/theimportanceofstatisticsforafricasdevelopment.pdf>

Objectives and expected outcomes of the meeting (Agenda item 2)

Mr. Latigo outlined the objectives and expected outcomes of the workshop. He stated that the overall objective of the workshop was to forge a strategic partnership with NSOs in order to address capacity constraints in the generation, analysis and dissemination of statistical data across the subregion. Arising from this partnership, it was envisaged that ECA-SA would have timely access to useful, reliable and comparable statistical data from member States for its various publications.

Recalling the expected outcomes of the meeting, namely to (i) propose a framework for collaboration between ECA-SA and NSOs for the development of statistical information systems at various levels; (ii) harmonize the generation, analysis and dissemination of statistics at the subregional level; and (iii) lay a foundation for building of a regional database, he informed the participants that the meeting's recommendations would be synthesised into a draft report to form part of the background information for a similar meeting to be held in February 2010.

Overview of ECA and ECA-SA activities (Agenda item 3)

Mr. Latigo highlighted the special institutional collaboration existing among ECA, AfDB and the AU within the context of realizing Africa's development agenda. He further informed the meeting that the AU had a unique political mandate to coordinate the implementation of Africa's development and regional integration while AfDB and ECA provided the financial and technical leverage to the continent's development agenda.

Based on its mandate and the AU agenda, ECA focused on activities where its competence, contributions and comparative advantage were widely acknowledged. ECA strived to achieve results in two related and mutually supportive pillars, namely (i) promoting regional integration (RI) in support of AU vision and priorities; and (ii) helping Africa to meet its special needs and global challenges.

Mr. Latigo stated that ECA had been supporting the process of RI as part of Africa's strategy for economic transformation and for integration into the global economy. ECA's special support to regional integration was further demonstrated by its key role in the formulation of the Abuja Treaty, NEPAD, establishment of AfDB, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Association of African Central Banks (AACB) and over 30 related institutions in Africa such as the Centre for Studies on RI in Mozambique; monitoring progress in integration-building capacities for implementing the Abuja Treaty for establishing the African Economic Community (AEC); and promoting NEPAD initiatives, particularly in infrastructure development, sectoral issues, and peer learning.

At the subregional level, the ECA through its subregional office in Lusaka, Zambia has been involved in the project to mainstream regional integration in national development plans. The overall objective is to establish lasting institutional processes within government, from national to local levels, and within the wider stakeholder community, to bring about domestication of RI with a focus on the government bodies responsible for RI, and so as to strengthen the role of such bodies and non-governmental actors. It is worth noting that a pilot effort was initiated in 2008 in Mozambique with the development of a framework for mainstreaming RI in national development plans. ECA has also been

involved in supporting regional energy cooperation through a number of initiatives. For instance, the creation of power pools ranks high on the agenda of NEPAD and SADC.

The ECA subregional office in Zambia has been instrumental in reviving the Growth Triangle (comprising Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia). The Growth Triangle is defined as international neighbouring areas where economic differences can be used to promote international trade and foreign direct investment. Its main emphasis is that cross-border micro-regions are not givens, but are constructed and reconstructed through social practice, political economy and by a variety of States, corporations and non-State actors.

ECA is also involved in providing various forms of support to RECs and member States. In Southern Africa, the framework to strengthen the special partnership and cooperation between the SADC secretariat and the ECA-SA has now been translated into a multi-year programme, which among others, seeks to explore institutional modalities for strengthening collaboration between ECA and SADC. This collaboration directly contributes to greater institutional operational synergy resulting from a more coherent and strategic engagement.

It is worth noting that ECA conducts several studies and convenes consensus-building meetings on a wide range of issues within the context of supporting regional integration. In addition, ECA provides advisory services to member States through capacity-building, policy prescription, studies and publications, and hosting of special events and/or meetings.

Key publications of ECA and ECA-SA (Agenda item 4)

Mr. Latigo gave a detailed account of the main publications that were at the core of ECA's analytic and policy work. Some of the key publications are:

- ❖ The Economic Report on Africa
- ❖ Assessing Regional Integration in Africa
- ❖ The African Governance Report
- ❖ The African Women's Report
- ❖ The African Database
- ❖ The Regional Integration Observatory
- ❖ The Report on Economic and Social Conditions in Southern Africa
- ❖ Various economic analyses for Southern Africa
- ❖ The Regional Economic Development Strategy in Southern Africa
- ❖ The Annual Human Development Report

Templates for various ECA-SA publications (Agenda item 5)

Mr. Latigo and Mr. Jack Jones Zulu, the Social Affairs Officer presented to the participants a number of templates that the ECA-SA uses for its key publications. Using the templates, the two presenters highlighted the important economic and social indicators that are critical in the production of these publications. Some of the notable indicators highlighted in the presentations were:

- Growth rate
- Inflation
- Exchange rate
- Fiscal deficit
- Public debt
- Current account balance
- Savings and investments
- Trade and finance in Southern Africa
- Education and training
- Health (access to health, infant and maternal mortality rates)
- HIV and AIDS
- Employment and labour
- Water and sanitation
- Gender
- Mining
- Infrastructure
- ICT

Plenary discussions (Agenda item 6 and Agenda item 7)

In the ensuing discussions, participants expressed satisfaction in regard to the work of ECA-SA particularly the wide range of its publications. However, they were surprised that most of the key publications were never sent to them despite their strategic role as disseminators of information. An appeal was made to ECA-SA to carry out sensitization programmes and/or advocacy of its activities for national statistical offices and other stakeholders in general. It was the hope of ECA-SA, through sensitization, create more awareness about its presence and the services it offers to a wide spectrum of stakeholders both at the national and subregional levels.

It was noted that there were a lot of institutions involved in the production and dissemination of statistics resulting in duplication of effort. Although in some instances, statistics were readily available, participants expressed concern at the disparities in data, particularly those coming from international organizations including UN agencies. The meeting questioned the authenticity and credibility of statistics from international organizations given that most of them generated data using computer models that did not usually depict the reality in the member States.

Thus the participants reiterated the SADC position on the need to use statistics from the primary source, i.e. the national statistical offices, to avoid sending wrong signals to policy makers and other end users.

There was consensus on the need for to forge closer ties in terms of information sharing and encouraging peer learning to promote best practices in the statistics sector.

It was strongly felt that ECA should assist in addressing the institutional challenge faced by some national statistical offices face capacity constraints in terms of producing statistics to meet various needs.

Establishment of database in Southern Africa (Agenda item 8)

The participants strongly endorsed the proposal to establish a regional data base to be hosted by the SADC Secretariat. However, they cautioned that ECA-SA should first liaise with SADC to define the content of such a data base and how it could be made to respond to the needs of various users in the subregion. Once the modalities have been worked out for the proposed data base ECA-SA should then facilitate the setting up of the facility.

Developing a joint framework for collaboration (Agenda item 9)

A proposal was put forward on the need for ECA-SA and the NSOs to creatively think of establishing an institutional framework for collaboration. This proposal was briefly debated in the ensuing plenary discussions.

Plenary discussions (Agenda item 10)

The meeting unanimously adopted the proposal for the establishment of a framework of institutional collaboration between ECA-SA and the NSOs. A suggestion was made that the starting point should be for ECA-SA to write to all heads of NSOs clearly stating the objectives of the proposed framework and also explaining what each party would be expected to do, when and where. It was felt that the next meeting of ECA-SA and NSOs scheduled tentatively for February 2010 should be able to throw more light on the structure of the proposed framework.

Presentation of Recommendations (Agenda item 11)

After the plenary discussions, a number of critical recommendations were generated and presented to the participants for further discussions. Below are the major recommendations that emerged from the meeting:

- As a matter of priority, all NSOs in the subregion should endeavour to harmonize their data and statistics to allow for comparability. Harmonization should also be undertaken at national level for various government agencies such as Ministries of Finance, Central Banks and NSOs
- ECA-SA should call for a meeting of data producing agencies (NSOs) and users such as the IMF, the World Bank, UN agencies, and others to improve on the user-producer dialogue
- All statistics should be obtained from the primary source, i.e. NSOs, to avoid data disparities and at the same time promote data credibility. Any projections or extrapolations of data on any country should be cleared by national authorities, i.e. the producing agencies (NSOs)
- ECA-SA should share with NSOs its key publications for validation of statistical information before sharing with the wider public
- NSOs should appoint focal points to interface with the ECA-SA for purposes of data collection and participation in the review of ECA-SA publications

- ECA-SA should deposit its publications in NSOs as they have libraries to accommodate such materials
- ECA-SA should harmonize and coordinate its statistical and other related activities including sharing the calendar of events with SADC Secretariat to avoid duplication of effort
- ECA, AfDB, AUC, SADC and other partners should coordinate their advisory services and technical support to member States to avoid duplication of effort and ensure optimum use of resources
- ECA-SA should carry out sensitization programmes through meetings and workshops and other publicity channels on its major publications for NSOs and other stakeholders
- NSOs should be represented in all future Inter-governmental Committee of Experts (ICE)'s meetings and other important ECA events
- ECA-SA should assist in building requisite capacities of NSOs to enable them to compute various indices for national and international publications as well as the production of disaggregated data
- Before embarking on data collection missions, ECA-SA should share its templates for various data needs with NSOs for their input

Follow up actions and way forward (Agenda item 12)

The immediate follow-up action from the ECA-SA would be to circulate the meeting's draft report to all participants for their information. More importantly, ECA-SA was urged to refine the recommendations and send them over to heads of NSOs and the SADC Secretariat for their consideration.

Evaluation and closing remarks (Agenda item 13)

Mr. Latigo thanked all the participants for their hard work and commitment during the two-day intense discussions. He paid special thanks to the Government of the Royal Kingdom of Swaziland through the NSO for co-hosting the meeting with ECA-SA. He informed the meeting that the recommendations that had been generated would go a long way in assisting ECA-SA to reposition and optimize its data collection exercise. Mr. Latigo noted that the meeting had availed the ECA-SA an excellent opportunity to get closer to the NSOs in the subregion and thus helped to cement institutional ties with them.

In a vote of thanks Ms. Nelsiwe Dlamini from the Swaziland national statistical office thanked ECA-SA for holding the meeting in Swaziland. She also thanked the participants for coming to the Kingdom of Swaziland and hoped that they had enjoyed their stay. She ended by challenging policy makers in the subregion to anchor their decision-making processes on the use of credible statistics especially those obtained from the NSOs.

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