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**Sixth Meeting of the Coordinating
Committee on African Statistical
Development (CASD)**

**8 - 9 March 1996
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Influencing Decision-Makers:
The Role of Statisticians**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The CASD Secretariat acknowledges the proposal of this agenda item by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT), European Union. The CASD Secretariat endorsed this proposal bearing in mind that statistics are used mainly for making decisions in all aspects of our social and economic life. The Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s recommended that governments should give high priority to statistical activities and that statistics should be seen as central to the formulation of plans and strategies.

2. The Purpose of statistics is to make inferences about a population from which the data are obtained. Statistical data is mainly used as a basis for predictions and decision making. The role of statisticians therefore is to study the various inferential procedures and look for a best predictor or decision making process for a given situation.

II. THE ROLE OF STATISTICIANS IN INFLUENCING DECISION MAKERS

A. Influence of CASD and its Sub-committees

3. At the Joint meeting of the Training and Organization and Management of National Statistical Systems Sub-committees which was held in Paris, France from 15-17 January 1996, bearing in mind that this agenda item was to be discussed at the 6th meeting of CASD, started a discussion on how CASD and its sub-committees can influence decision-makers. The points made by participants at this meeting are summarised below.

(a) Identification of decision-makers

4. There is need to identify key decision-makers. An example which was provided was that of those who take decision over priorities for requests for donor funds. Equally there are those who make decisions on matters affecting the social and economic life of the population. Social statistics indicators may point to the correct decisions to be taken. Key decision makers may be the Permanent Secretary or Minister of Finance and Planning.

(b) Targeting decision-makers

5. Once the decision-makers have been identified, they should be targeted. An example which was provided was that of one organization which targeted at its Director-General, with personal information packs. This information although available in other statistical publications was especially prepared in such a way that the Director General could use it in a more user-friendly manner. One important feature about this is that this information should be

updated more frequently for the Director-General. This information will help the Director General to include in his speeches or to make decisions about the direction of plans and programmes. It was noted that the personal information packs could also be used by a head of state and government.

6. Regarding CASD, targeting Directors of Central Statistical Offices who may be unaware of CASD and its activities, would no doubt help to influence them to take decisions on whether to implement certain Action Plans such as Needs Assessment and Strategy Development (NASD) exercises, as part of their implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s.

7. Concerning the Conference of African Planners, Statisticians, Population and Information Specialists, participants thought that describing CASD activities to the Plenary meetings other than Statistics Committee meetings would have added value. The need to inform planners, population and information specialists about CASD and its activities could influence their participation in the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action at national level. Participants were pleased to note that a paper on "Statistical Needs Assessment and Strategy Development exercises: the African experience" was included in the plenary agenda of the Ninth Session of the Conference of African Planners, Statisticians, Population and Information Specialists, 11-16 March 1996, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

(c) Influence at high-level meetings

8. Participants felt that there is need to influence high-level meetings such as the Special Programme of Assistance (SPA) and its working groups. An attempt was made by the World Bank to influence the SPA meeting, on CASD activities, during their meeting which was held in September 1995 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

B. Other influencing techniques

(a) Organisation of high level seminars

9. The Nigeria experience of organizing executive seminars at state level involving top policy people (users and producers of information) can be a good way of influencing decision-makers. This experience was discussed at the Joint meeting of the Training and Organization and Management of National Statistics Systems Sub-committees in Paris, France, January 1996. The Federal Office of Statistics which organized these seminars reported that in at least one state, the seminar led to an immediate increase in resources for state statistics.

10. Some participants at the Paris meeting stated that "the Nigeria experience was an excellent example to bring to the attention of other Directors of Statistics for repeating in their countries on a national basis. This would allow sensitization of a large number of national policy makers with their own data at hand.

(b) Papers and speeches presented at high level meetings

11. Another way of influencing decision-makers is to include agenda items on statistics at high level policy meetings such as the ECA Conference of Ministers responsible for Economic Planning and Development. ECA has periodically presented a paper on "progress report on the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s" at this meeting. This paper is aimed at sensitizing ministers on the Addis Ababa Plan of Action and on CASD activities. Since statistics is vital in economic planning and development efforts, it should feature prominently in this meeting. This would ensure that Ministers are adequately sensitized to make use of statistics in their decision-making process.

12. The dissemination of publications to key decision-makers (i.e. Director-General, Permanent Secretary, etc.) should be hand delivered by the Director of Statistics. If possible an executive summary highlighting the main results should accompany the publication. The hand delivery of the publications would also enable the Director of Statistics to make a verbal statement on the importance of the data which is presented in the publication.

13. In order to influence decision-makers, in addition to presenting volumes of massive data to users of statistics, there is need to subject the data to some analysis and interpretation. Graphs and charts are easily prepared these days on micro-computers and can be very informative to policy and decision-makers. Again such publications should be widely disseminated using methods described in the above paragraph.

(d) Indirect techniques

14. What we have described so far may be described as direct techniques of influencing decision-makers. There are, however, indirect techniques which could also influence decision-makers to be well informed about the field of statistics. The one technique which has been used in Nigeria is that of conducting workshops for journalists on key economic and social indicators and statistical development issues. These workshops can be organized periodically to cover different topics such as gross domestic product (GDP), Price indexes and inflation, devaluation and exchange rates, etc. The idea being that the journalists would be able to appreciate the

importance of these indicators to enable them raise appropriate questions to high level policy makers such as the head of state or ministers at press conferences. This would in turn force the high level policy makers to get informed and hence take into account statistics in their decision-making process.

III. CONCLUSION

15. The role of statisticians in influencing decision makers is a very important direction which CASD and its sub-committees should be promoting. The time for statisticians to play a passive role in the marketing of products which they disseminate is over. Statisticians are expected to assist decision-makers in choosing the best predictor or decision making process for a given situation.

16. The CASD Secretariat has attempted to put together points discussed at the Joint meeting of the CASD Training and Organization and Management of National Statistical Systems sub-committees, Paris, 15-17 January 1996 and those points it was able to assemble from experiences of countries such as Nigeria. Participants at this meeting are invited to provide their views and additional suggestions on the way(s) they see statisticians playing an active role in influencing decision-makers.