

The Dawning of a Statistical Renaissance in Africa

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1. Introduction

It is the contention of the author that statistical challenges notwithstanding, there is generally lack of knowledge about statistics and statistical development in Africa, and that often, African statistics have been vilified or even distorted by people who do not always appreciate the nuance and context in which statistical work is undertaken in the African continent. Secondly, the author argues that there was a time when some organizations entertained the erroneous idea that if you wanted statistics on any African country, you would go to the web sites of international organizations and it would all be there. This was erroneous to the extent that statistics will not be available if no conscious effort is made to create the necessary environment and build infrastructure as well as capacity to collect and manage them at country level. Finally the author believes that there is limited narration, mapping and documentation of the history, challenges and developments in statistics in Africa. As a result, a lot of progress made thus far and the momentum built for improvements in statistics in Africa is not widely known or appreciated. . In his forthcoming book on “A Statistical Renaissance in Africa in Support of Evidence-based Policy, Decision-making and Good Governance”, the author does the above and more. In this connection, he makes the case for Afro-statistical optimism.

The Afro-statistical optimism is engendered by the fact that although there have been challenges to statistics in Africa, (i) more effective statistical advocacy is increasingly beginning to bear fruit, (ii) there are tremendous opportunities which are increasingly being taken advantage of to improve the quantity, quality, and timeliness as well as use of statistics especially for public policy and decision-making, (iii) new frameworks, initiatives, strategies and action plans have been designed and are being implemented to enhance statistical development in the continent, and (iv) Africa is not just following trends in statistical development; in some instances it has set trends. The paper is a narrative of the said Afro-statistical optimism.

This paper has drawn liberally on various reports including the “Report of the Economic Commission for Africa to the 44th Session of the UN Statistical Commission” (February 2013), a paper by Dimitri Sanga to the African Statistical Coordination Committee on “The Challenges of Sustaining the Gains of the last Decade in Statistical Development in Africa” (January 2013), the author’s draft of above mentioned book, different reports by the African Union, African Development Bank and the UN Economic Commission for Africa, among others

The paper is divided into four sections. Section one gives a broad introduction. Section 2 gives a summary of challenges that statistical systems have faced and are continuing to face with varying degrees of severity in Africa. There are opportunities that have presented themselves for

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statistical development since 1999. These are presented in section 3. Sections 4 and 5 respectively present some key initiatives and a new architecture for continental, regional and national statistical systems in Africa.

2. Challenges for statistical development in Africa

The challenges for statistical development in Africa manifest themselves in different forms and with varying degrees of severity at different levels – continental, regional and national level. The most vivid challenges are highlighted in this paper.

There was a precipitous decline in statistical production in Africa in 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The decline was caused by, among other things, political instability and wars that affected data collection in affected countries, economic crises of the 1970s and subsequent liberal policy reforms - Structural Adjustments Programmes - of the 1980s and 1990s that led to the neglect of National Statistics Offices (NSOs), inadequate leadership and management of NSOs, etc. The decline trapped many countries in a “vicious cycle” of statistical underdevelopment and under-performance which manifest themselves in the countries in many ways.

Many assessments of national statistical systems in Africa have been undertaken by different organizations and agencies, the National Statistics Offices (NSOs) themselves especially in the course of designing their National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS), and by different scholars. These assessments have come with a catalogue of challenges that have led to a pessimistic view of development statistics in Africa (Afro-statistical pessimism) in some quarters. For instance, in his article in the Guardian (Morten Jerven, 2012) titled “*Lies, damn lies and GDP*”, Morten Jerven, an Assistant Professor at the Simon Fraser University, School for International Studies in Canada says that “...it is a real tragedy that the statistical capacities of sub-Saharan African economies are in such a poor state. African development statistics tell us less than we would like to think about income, poverty and growth in the region. One of the most urgent challenges in African economic development is to devise a strategy for improving statistical capacity. This system currently causes more confusion than enlightenment.” He has published through the Cornell University Press a book titled “*Poor Numbers: how we are misled by African development statistics and what to do about it*”, which will be launched at the conference. It is also important to mention that the Journal of Development Studies will be publishing a special issue on “*Statistical Tragedy in Africa: Evaluating the Data Base for African Economic Development*” following the conference.

Shantayanan Devarajan, Chief Economist of World Bank Africa Region has published a paper on Africa’s Statistical Tragedy in the Review of Income and Wealth 2013 (Shantayanan Devarajan, 2013). The thesis of the paper is that statistical foundations of the recent growth in per-capita GDP and reduction in poverty are quite weak. The “statistical tragedy”, he contends, is that we cannot be sure that there is economic growth or that poverty is declining. In many countries, he says, GDP accounts use old methods, population censuses are out of date, and poverty estimates are infrequent and often not comparable over time. He gives the example of Ghana and Malawi as follows, “.....Ghana decided in 2010 to update its GDP to the 1993 system. The update also provided an opportunity to review in-depth the basic data underlying the country’s GDP estimates. The combination of improved basic data sources and adoption of the 1993 system led to Ghana’s GDP being 62 percent higher than previously thought. Newspaper

reports of Ghana's remarkable "growth" in GDP prompted several other countries to consider revising their national accounts. Malawi, for example, recently revised its GDP estimates by over 30 percent.....". African statistics have also been referred to as "statistical fiction". However, we show in section four of this paper that selective evidence is used by the Afro-statistical pessimists to make their point.

Some of the challenges which have not been discussed much are those which have been faced by Regional Economic Communities (RECs), sub-regional organizations and pan-African organizations which also play a significant role in statistical development in Africa. This paper touches on these challenges and highlights efforts by these organizations to strengthen their statistical functions thereby strengthening their ability to assist countries meet their statistical challenges.

There have been many calls to fix Africa's statistics. These calls have been made in different fora and at different levels including conferences of African Ministers responsible for finance and planning; meetings of inter-governmental bodies on statistics such as the UN Statistical Commission, Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa) and the African Symposium for Statistical Development; and meetings of international organizations and bodies such as World Bank and PARIS21. The latest calls include one by Marcelo Giugale, the World Bank's Director of Economic Policy and Poverty Reduction Programs for Africa. On his blog, Marcelo Giugale made the call on 8 January 2013 to "Fix Africa's Statistics" and compared the story of statistics in Africa to an *"airline that has not invested enough in flight instruments but still fly and ask passengers to relax and enjoy their flight"*. He concluded that there are major problems with data on African countries' development, problems that call for an urgent, game-changing action. In his own blog, however, he mentions some things that are already happening which are cause for optimism – strengthening legal frameworks to enhance the integrity of statistics, etc.

It would have been a "statistical tragedy" if the challenges faced by the African Statistical System were left to perpetuate themselves or if half-hearted efforts were made to meet the challenges. In fact it would have been a "greater statistical tragedy" if the statistical community in Africa failed to "harvest the low hanging fruit" in form of opportunities for statistical development created by countries signing up to managing for development results (a conducive public policy environment). From institutional viewpoint, the last ten years or so have been a watershed, witnessing the galvanization of pan-African, regional and national organizations and the statistical community in Africa generally to address the above challenges and to create "virtuous" statistical systems where data are improving and increasingly, they are being used for public policy and decision-making, among many purposes. How this has/is being done is the gist of this paper.

It is important to mention that scaling up for statistical development in Africa in recent years has been based on the premise that the aforementioned challenges are systemic and mutually reinforcing, and that they cannot be resolved by a "silver bullet" but rather by utilizing holistic, strategic and integrated approaches that cascade from the international to continental to regional and finally, to country level. The next section presents some opportunities how these have been/ are being taken advantage of to improve statistics in Africa.

3. Some opportunities for improving statistics

Many opportunities for improving statistics have presented themselves in the last 10 years or so and these are increasingly being taken advantage of by African countries and institutions. They include the following, among others:

3.1 Establishment of PARIS21 (Partnerships in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century) consortium

PARIS21 is a unique global partnership of national and international statisticians, development practitioners, policy makers, analysts and other users of statistics who are committed to making a difference to the contribution of statistics to development processes. It was established on African Statistics Day, 18th November 1999 with the goals to develop a culture of evidence-based policy making and implementation in developing countries which serves to improve governance and government effectiveness in reducing poverty and achieving MDGs. It drew inspiration from and built on foundations laid by the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s. The plan was officially adopted in May 1990 by the 16th United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) Conference of Ministers responsible for economic development and planning.

PARIS21 is at the cutting-edge of statistical advocacy and it has assisted to promote evidence-based policy and decision-making (use of statistics) at different levels, investment in statistical production and development, and promoting the design and implementation of the NSDS as a robust, comprehensive and coherent framework to facilitate the development of statistics in a coordinated and synergic manner, using modern and proven management principles. There is now better statistical advocacy taking place and indeed more resources are being committed to statistics by national governments (although much more needs to be done).

3.2 Improved policy environment for statistical development

Most countries in Africa have signed up to managing for development results (MfDR) which has since 2002 evolved as a global effort among both national governments and development agencies to: (i) reduce poverty (MDG 1 goal 1), (ii) support sustainable and equitable economic growth, (iii) better define and systematically measure development outcomes, and (iv) report on achievements of outcomes and impact of policies and programmes. In the context of this paradigm, countries designed Poverty Reduction Strategies and National Development Plans. In addition, they committed to New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)² and associated action plans, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

MfDR has led to increase in demand for development statistics at different levels and provided opportunities to review the NSSs and to make a case for national and international support for and investment in statistical production and development in Africa.

² *NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) is a blue print for Africa's development in the 21st century. It was formally adopted by the 37th Summit of Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 2001 as a strategic framework document that promises Africa's renewal.*

3.3 Paris declaration on aid effectiveness

This declaration made in 2005 to improve aid practices and effectiveness in helping developing countries, reduce poverty and improve human welfare by 2015 recognizes the need for better statistics for more effective aid. Its principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results and mutual accountability have helped in, among other things, coordinating donor assistance to statistics (including basket funding), strengthening and reliance on NSSs assessing the effectiveness of donor assistance. In Rwanda, for instance, main partners financing the NSDS activities, apart from the Government of Rwanda, are: The United Kingdom Department for International Development, European Commission, One UN family, The World Bank, The African Development Bank, and the Belgian Technical Cooperation. Mozambique is also actively implementing basket funding arrangements involving Nordic countries and other donors.

3.4 Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (MAPS)

This plan was endorsed at the 2nd Roundtable on Managing for Results in Morocco in 2004 to plan for improving national and international statistics in support of MDG monitoring. It has six (6) action points, namely to:

- mainstream strategic planning of statistical systems,
- prepare for the 2010 population census round, increase investment in statistics, etc.,
- set up an International Household Survey Network ,
- improve MDG monitoring, and
- improve international accountability in statistics.

MAPS has been implemented to improve statistics in Africa as can be seen below.

3.4.1 Mainstream strategic planning of statistical systems

Designing the NSDS was conceptualized in 2004 by PARIS21 to provide a strategic approach to improving national statistical systems and building statistical capacity to provide the information needed for poverty-focused development programmes. It has since become the blue print for statistical development in Africa and other developing regions. Where the sectoral approach espoused by the African Development Bank *et al* has been used to design the NSDS, it has improved the state of statistics in sectors.

So far, 22 African countries (55%) are currently implementing the NSDS, 13 (32.5%) are currently designing NSDS or awaiting its adoption, 4 (10%) have strategy expired or without a strategy and currently planning an NSDS, and 1 country has no strategy and not planning to have one. The emphasis has now shifted from the design to the implementation of the NSDS.

3.4.2 The 2010 round of population censuses

In Africa, the Population and Housing Census (census) makes a significant contribution to the development of the NSS in general and in particular, to the development of social statistics. The census provides: benchmark data needed to plan for socio-economic development and to calculate a number of development indicators e.g. fertility rates, school enrolment rates, etc.; data

on housing status of households with regard to tenure, type and availability of housing facilities; lists and supplementary data for inter-censal surveys; and a complete list of all places and persons, villages and households, and Enumeration Areas for the whole country. The census which in developing countries is conducted every ten years also makes a significant contribution to the building of statistical capacity.

It may be recalled that 17 African countries (about 33%) did not participate in the 2000 census round, and as a result, about half the African population was not enumerated during that round. Due to effective advocacy in countries and across Africa, 33 countries have already undertaken their census and all others except Somalia are planning to undertake their census before 2015. Of 48 African countries with 1 million plus population, already 31 have conducted a 2010 round census; 17 have not. And 74% of the population of African has been enumerated in the last 8 years; with 26% remaining to be enumerated before 2015. An assessment of Africa's 2010 Census Round shows that of the remaining 17 countries, 7 are likely to undertake their census by 2015 while 10 are unlikely to do so (Robert McCaa, 2013). Even with this scenario, Africa will have done better in the current census round than it did in the 2000 round. To achieve it, the UNECA in collaboration with AfDB, AUC and with strong support from Statistics-South Africa, has assisted countries to build capacity in various areas of census taking, through workshops and expert group meetings on various areas related to census taking. In addition, the UNECA developed a series of manuals for improving data quality while undertaking the census. These included: (a) African Addendum on Principles and Recommendations on Population and Housing Censuses; (b) Handbook on Data Capture; (c) Handbook on Data Editing; and (d) Handbook on Data Tabulation.

3.4.3 The International Household Survey Network (IHSN)

The IHSN was established in September 2004 as a recommendation of MAPS to foster the improvement of the availability, accessibility and quality of survey data in developing countries, and to encourage their analysis and use by national and international development decision makers, the research community, and other stakeholders. It has, among other things, produced and is promoting use of a microdata management toolkit for the documentation, dissemination and preservation of survey/census data. In context of IHSN, many countries have improved and publish metadata to facilitate information sharing and appropriate interpretation of statistics by both data users and producers. Some have published metadata dictionaries to guide stakeholders on definitions, data sources, compilation practices, computational methods, accessibility and availability and accounting conventions for key indicators (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

The IHSN does not provide technical support. However, the team which coordinates the IHSN activities also coordinates the implementation of a related program, the Accelerated Data Program (ADP). The ADP supports data producers and users in developing countries by helping them make better use of existing data and aligning survey programs and statistical outputs to priority data needs. This is done through: making survey microdata more accessible, increasing microdata use and strengthening the demand, and improving the quality of future surveys. Key outputs include the establishment of national survey databanks and establishment of national data collection standards to foster comparability of data across sources.

Since 2006, 31 African countries have joined the ADP that is hosted by PARIS21. In these countries, national survey catalog has been made available on NSO websites. According to the UN Statistics Division web site, as many as 47 African NSOs have web sites. These web sites are increasingly being used to disseminate data; all available nationally representative surveys and censuses documented, archived and disseminated; and capacity built and sustained within NSO to document, archive and disseminate microdata - as standard processes of every survey undertaken. In addition, NSO staff have been trained on microdata management standards, tools and practice and top management sensitized. However, more work needs to be done to increase data availability to users.

3.4.4 Improve development monitoring

To address statistical challenges facing Africa, StatCom-Africa has set up seven Working Groups (WGs) on key statistical subject-matters, including the African Group on Development Indicators (AGDI). The group came up with a number of recommendations that aim to improve the development and monitoring of development indicators, including MDGs. These recommendations focused on the need to: carry out studies; produce handbooks; build databases; set up monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at country level; and provide resources for the functioning of AGDI.

So far, a number of activities have been undertaken including studies on how to decrease statistical discrepancies in MDG indicators between national, regional and international sources, and studies on best practices adopted by countries in the African region with regard to statistical production, monitoring, reporting, dissemination and use of data on MDG indicators. A Study on Sources and Methodologies for Newly Identified Development Indicators Customized to the Realities, Needs and Priorities for Human and Social Development beyond 2015 has also been undertaken and is under finalization. These studies led to the development and publication of the Handbook on Data Sources and Estimation of Development Indicators in African Countries. MDG focal points have been designated in almost all countries and MDG Committees established in many countries to take forward the recommendations from the said studies.

Finally, pan-African organizations are working towards: (i) developing a Handbook on Major Data Management and Dissemination Platforms based on the inputs collected from the workshop held on the same subject; (ii) encouraging countries to update their DevInfo versions or other databases to get web-based platforms; (iii) systematically involving civil society and private sector in MDG monitoring, already undertaken at the highest levels of the government in many countries; and (iv) implementing the ECA Project on Strengthening Statistical Capacities of African Countries to meet challenges in the collection, compilation, dissemination, and use of data to address inclusive social and economic development agendas: looking beyond 2015.

3.5 The Busan Action Plan for Statistics

Building on the successes of the MAPS, the Busan Action Plan for Statistics (BAPS) was endorsed at the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, Korea in November 2011. It reaffirms the commitment to effective internal development and a need for “*transparent, country-led, and country-level results frameworks*” based on a “*manageable number of output and outcome indicators...*” Participants agreed to “*...partner to implement a global Action Plan*

to enhance capacity for statistics to monitor progress, evaluate impact, ensure sound, results-focused public sector management, and highlight strategic issues for policy decisions.” The 5 action points of the BAPS are: (i) Strengthen and re-focus national and regional statistical strategies with particular emphasis on improving statistical systems that address country level development priorities; (ii) Implement standards for data preservation, documentation, and dissemination that permit broader public access to statistics; (iii) Develop programs to increase the knowledge and skills needed to use statistics effectively for planning, analysis, monitoring, and evaluation, thus increasing transparency and accountability and improve accessibility of statistics at the national and international levels; (iv) Build and maintain results monitoring instruments to track outcomes of all global summits and high level forums; and (v) Ensure financing for statistical information is robust and that funding instruments and approaches reflect the new modalities and actors in development finance.

With the above opportunities in hand, the statistical community in Africa has: scaled up statistical advocacy; developed and implemented frameworks, strategies and action plans; streamlined statistical governance; created an enabling statistical architecture; strengthened institutions and organizations with special emphasis on partnership and collaboration; designed and implemented the NSDS in most countries; and ensured that Africa’s voice is heard in international meetings on statistics and statistical development. In addition, substantial skills have been built in census and survey data collection and management in many African countries. All this has led to improvements in statistical systems in Africa. Indeed, recent years have witnessed improvements in data production in the continent – there has been an increase in data quantity and quality.

All this has ushered in a statistical renaissance and generated a momentum for statistical development in the continent, which in the view of the author, is not a fleeting phenomenon but rather a firm basis for statistical development in the continent, hence the Afro-statistical optimism expressed in the paper. In the next section, we present the hallmarks of the said renaissance.

4. Hallmarks of the renaissance

4.1 Scaled up statistical advocacy

With the establishment of PARIS21, the statistical community in Africa has been empowered and equipped with appropriate advocacy messages, strategies and materials. As a result, statistical advocacy has been stepped up in the continent as can be seen in the sequel:

- (a) Endorsement of the African Charter on Statistics by Heads of State and Governments in 2009. The charter was prepared by the African Union Commission (AUC) in close collaboration with stakeholders of the African Statistics System to work as a tool for statistical advocacy at the highest level of government and commit African governments to scale up support to statistics. The Charter is derived from the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. The Charter and SHaSa (see later) are helping countries to refocus their statistical legislations. Implementation of the Charter has, however, been generally slow.

- (b) Enhanced celebration of African Statistics Day. The 18th of November was adopted in 1990 by the Conference of African Ministers responsible for planning to be celebrated each year to increase public awareness of the important role which statistics play in all aspects of social and economic life. More and more countries are celebrating the day with increased vigour, intensity and impact. Some countries have done even better by spreading celebrations over a whole week to increase impact.
- (c) Taking advantage of the process of designing the NSDS, a lot of advocacy has been undertaken especially in sectors (line ministries) where, generally: statistics has a low profile, in many cases there is no line for statistics in a ministry budget, statisticians in sectors are largely isolated and inadequately involved in discussion on capacity building, sectoral component of the National Statistics System (NSS) has tended to be under-resourced and is in need of more voice in sectors and in NSS, and statisticians are more susceptible to inappropriate political pressure.

4.2 Statistical initiatives, frameworks and strategies

The following initiatives, frameworks and strategies have been developed for statistical development in Africa. They are different stages of implementation.

4.2.1 African Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD)

This is a country-led initiative for statistical development that started in South Africa in 2006 following a meeting held in Cameroon in 2005 at which countries expressed concern at the slow progress registered with regards to the implementation of the 2010 round of Population and Housing Census. The ASSD has since been hosted by Rwanda, Ghana, Angola, Senegal, Egypt, South Africa and Cote d'Ivoire. Championed by South Africa, it has served to advocate for census at the highest political level and has been addressed by key policy makers and Heads of State and Government, Prime Ministers and Ministers in host countries. This initiative has done a lot to mobilize Africa to participate in the 2010 round of censuses.

There are two interesting things to note about implementation of the 2010 census round:

- (i) While there are capacity deficits in some countries in some statistical areas, collectively there is capacity in Africa which can be harnessed for statistical development in the continent. This has been called different names including “peer support mechanism” in context of the implementation of the 2010 population and housing census in Africa, etc. This consideration is consistent with the distinctly African “Ubuntu” value system that stresses the mutual dependence of a person on another. And so it was with the 5th Population Census of the Sudan conducted from the 22nd of April to the 6th of May 2008. In the spirit of “Ubuntu”, the Statistics Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa) meeting held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in January 2008 urged African NSOs to provide support to Sudan as she conducted her population census. Mozambique, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Kenya, Egypt, Ethiopia and South Africa sent their staff members to Sudan to assist as monitors and technical advisers to the Sudanese census. They worked side by side with locals and for each state there were at least three people local and international observers of the Sudanese Census.

- (ii) It is worth mentioning that during the current census round, the Kenya census campaign won the 2010 United Nations Grand Award for outstanding achievement in public relations. The campaign spurred widespread participation in Kenya's 2009 population census. The award was presented in London by the Director of the UN Regional Information Centre for Western Europe as part of the 2010 International Public Relations Association Golden World Awards. The winning campaign, "Nipo Natambulika" or "Count Me In," was commissioned by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. As a result of the campaign, 98 per cent of Kenya's 12 million households participated in the census, the highest rate since independence in 1963.

The theme for the ASSD has since 2011 changed from census to civil registration and vital statistics.

4.2.2 International Comparison Programme)

The International Comparison Programme (ICP) was initially established in the early 1970s to provide a framework for producing internationally (cross-country) comparable price levels and economic aggregates in real terms. One (1) African country participated in the 1970 round, 22 in the 1993 round, 48 in the 2005 round and 50 in the 2011 round. While African countries that took part in successive ICP rounds before 2005 were able to improve their price statistics, the improvements were not systematically integrated with their permanent statistical work programmes, partly due to resource limitations, and partly because the ICP did not address issues of long-term statistical capacity building.

In 2002, the African Development Bank (AfDB) initiated a major region-wide statistical capacity-building program, using the International Comparison Program for Africa (ICP-Africa) as a springboard. The AfDB is the coordinator of ICP-Africa. The program operated capacity-building activities in 48 of the 53 countries in Africa. Under the ICP, a lot of statistical capacity was built especially in economic statistics through training including training organized by NSOs at country level (*for enumerators and supervisors*), and training of ICP coordinators and statisticians in seminars and workshops organized by AfDB at regional and sub-regional levels. The program also supported general statistical development including the design of the NSDSs and six regional statistical training centres. These efforts were bolstered in September 2004 with additional funding to strengthen statistical capacity in African countries within the context of the International Comparison Program for Africa (ICP-Africa).

At the request of the countries to AfDB to scale up support to countries following the successful implementation of the statistical capacity building program Phase I under ICP-Africa, the Board of Directors of AfDB approved another grant to implement Phase II in 52 African countries. The program mainly focused on activities with regional public goods characteristics including (i) methodological development work to generate a statistical infrastructure and approach that fit the African environment; (ii) adaptation of international statistical standards to suit local conditions in the countries and conducting training workshops on these standards; (iii) harmonization of data generation practices and standards to ensure comparability of data across the countries and with the rest of the world; and (iv) training of country officials for strengthening statistical capacity. Currently, the Bank is implementing Phase III of the Statistical Capacity Building

Program, consisting of five components, namely Improving statistics on ADF focus areas; Improving Social Statistics, Poverty Monitoring and Analysis; Improving Macro-Economic Statistics; Data Development, Archiving and Dissemination; and Strategic Planning, Coordination and Training.

ICP-Africa 2011 activities began in 2010 and covered price statistics and national accounts activities as well as capacity building programmes. The preliminary results of the ICP 2011 are expected to release by November 2013. On the 2011 round, the World Bank had this to say about the ICP-Africa programme, *“The ICP capacity building activities will also build on relevant best practices, such as the African Development Bank’s program to strengthen statistical capacity in African countries under the framework of the ICP-Africa”*.

4.2.3 Strategy for Harmonization of Statistics in Africa

In order to gain traction in and support the African and regional integration agenda, particularly the Minimum Integration Programme (MIP) which was adopted by the African Heads of State and Government in July 2009, a Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA) was jointly developed by the AUC, AfDB and UNECA. SHaSA is an extension of the RRSF that seeks to harmonize statistics to support the continental and regional integration agendas and processes.

It was endorsed by the Joint AUC /UNECA Conference of Ministers of Finance and Economy in 2011. SHaSA is expected to be implemented through a number of statistical harmonization initiatives and programmes that are being implemented or that will be implemented in Africa at national, regional and continental levels. It is expected that by implementing the SHaSA, comparable statistics will be generated to facilitate improved program implementation and decision-making in support of the regional integration agenda for Africa as well as monitoring and reporting on Poverty Reduction Strategies, NEPAD and MDGs at country, continental and international levels.

4.2.4 Harmonized Consumer Price Index

The monitoring of monetary policies in Africa requires Consumer Price Indices (CPI) comparable across countries. Under the leadership of the AfDB, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and other Statistics Secretariats have since 2010 embarked on a programme to compile Harmonized Consumer Price Indices (HCPI), in line with the regional integration efforts of meeting the macroeconomic convergence criteria. Member countries of the two RECs have been compiling their respective HCPIs and posting them on COMESA, SADC and AfDB websites. AfDB, under statistical capacity building phase III, will provide similar support to the remaining sub-regional organizations, namely, the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Arab Maghreb Union and the East African Community.

4.2.5 Africa Strategy for the Implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts (2008SNA)

Much of the recent debate about statistics in Africa has centred on GDP estimation. In particular, there has been a focus on the rebasing and revision of GDP exercise which aims to collect and incorporate more detailed information especially from new sources, improve methodologies for data collection and introduce new systems for GDP estimation e.g. SNA93. A lot more needs to be done to expand data coverage to include informal sectors and other areas, still a challenge because of the structures of African economies. It is also important to mention that countries such as Ghana must be commended for improving data sources, revising the GDP estimates and coming openly to announce the changes – they followed the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. A related challenge that we see for countries is how best to communicate the revised figures to data users. Countries may want to learn from Kenya where the NSO has prepared an elaborate dissemination strategy for the new figures to be released next year that will result from the ongoing rebasing and revision of GDP exercise.

The following table gives changes in GDP values for 18 countries resulting from rebasing and revision of GDP estimates. Countries like South Africa introduced the System of National Accounts (SNA93) during the rebasing and revision of GDP indicated in the table.

The table shows that most countries cited rebased their GDP in the last decade. The table also shows that the Afro-statistical pessimists have used countries that have experienced extreme changes in their GDP values such as Ghana to make conclusions about the impact of rebasing and revising GDP in Africa. It can be seen from the table that some countries have recorded modest increases in GDP values, and indeed some few countries have recorded decreases in GDP values following the rebasing exercise. It should also be mentioned that the upward revisions of GDP are not unique to Africa or indeed to developing countries. Similar trends have been observed in America and other developed countries.

In order to support African countries facing the challenge of GDP compilation and/or wanting to migrate to SNA08, the StatCom-Africa established in 2010 the African Group on National Accounts (AGNA). The AGNA designed a strategy to establish National Accounts tools for African region in line with international standards and practices as was done in Europe. The five-year Regional Programme on the Implementation of the 2008 SNA_(2010-2014) was developed to implement the strategy through components related to: advocacy campaign which started with the 2011 ASSD; methodological developments followed by capacity building (training and technical assistance); and institutional setting and strengthening. These components will be supported by continuous monitoring, evaluation and reporting process.

Since the adoption of the Programme, several activities have been undertaken or launched including: the setting up of the coordination mechanism starting by the designation of focal points in the pan-African organizations, the adoption by AGNA of the terms of reference of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs); country snapshots in National Accounts of 44 African countries (as part of the M&E exercise); a study on the impact of the implementation of 2008 SNA in African countries with 10 countries which volunteered to participate for now; creation of a website at the African Centre for Statistics to archive AGNA documents and make them accessible by only the AGNA members; 2011 ICP-Africa activities; an initiative to help countries revise their GDP and CPI using sound approaches and in a transparent fashion.

Table: Impact of rebasing GDP in African countries at current prices

Country	Old base year	New base year	% difference between GDP old base and new base
1. Botswana	1993/1994	2006	-10.0
2. Burundi	1996	2005	40.3
3. Cape Verde	1980	2007	13.7
4. Chad	1995	2005	6.6
5. DRC	2000	2005	66.4
6. Egypt	2001/2002	2006/2007	8.9
7. Ethiopia	1999/2000	2010/2011	-1.0
8. Ghana	1993	2006	62.8
9. Lesotho	1995	2004	-4.4
10. Morocco	1988	1998	11.7
11. Mauritius	1992	1999	1.2
12. Niger	1987	2006	2.5
13. Rwanda		2006	10.0
14. Sierra Leone	2001	2006	25.6
15. Tanzania	2001	2007	10.0
16. Tunisia	1990	1997	9.8
17. Uganda	1997/1998	2002	10.5
18. South Africa	1993	1998	13.7

Source: *Communication with Mr. Beejaye Kokil, Manager, Economic Statistics Division, African Development Bank and communications with Heads of NSOs in some countries*

Africa is also contemplating the idea of economic census rounds. Currently, a peer review of the Ghana GDP rebasing led by the AfDB is ongoing.

4.2.6 Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

The development of NSSs in Africa and south-east Asian countries has not paid much attention to the development of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRSs) and these systems have by and large been orphaned. As a matter of fact, few countries in the two regions have complete civil registration systems. This has also been described by the Working Group on Monitoring Vital Events as a scandal of invisibility which has serious implications for vital statistics, human and constitutional rights, policy and national development. This scandal has also been identified as “*The single most critical failure of development over the last 30 years*” (Richard Horton, 2007). It is important to point out that not only have countries paid little attention to civil registration but also the international organizations and institutions. At international level, there is no UN agency currently responsible for registering births and deaths and there has been a call for a new international body to improve civil registration efforts. The UN agencies including WHO have not advocated effectively for better national mortality statistics (Richard Horton, *ibid*).

On their part, pan-African institutions have committed themselves to jump-starting civil registration systems in Africa. They organized a regional workshop on civil registration and vital statistics in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in July 2009 for officials from national civil registration offices and NSOs from 40 African countries as well as representatives of regional statistical training centres, regional and international organizations. The workshop identified, among other challenges, lack of political will to improve civil registration systems and recommended that a high-level Ministerial Conference on Improving Civil Registration be convened to address challenges facing effective functioning of civil registration systems in the continent. It also recommended that a medium-term programme for improving civil registration and vital statistics should be prepared by pan-African organizations in close collaboration with countries.

The first ever conference of African Ministers responsible for civil registration took place in August 2010. Following the endorsement by The Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union of the recommendation to institutionalize the Conference as a standing regional forum of the African Union to deal with matters concerning civil registration, the second conference was held in 2012.

A major initiative, the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System has been developed by pan-African institutions and key development partners and endorsed by the Conference of Ministers. It aims at adopting a holistic approach to address systemic issues related to legal, policy, management and operational aspects of CRVS. The ASSD, having achieved its previous objectives of getting African member states to embark on the 2010 Round of PHC, has decided to now focus on the development of CRVS in all countries across the continent.

One of the major achievements in this area has been the commitment made by the Ministers responsible for Civil Registration at their first conference held in August 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to support a time-bound implementation plan of the reform process for the improvement of CRVS systems in their respective countries. The Declaration made by ministers during the meeting and the Medium Term Action Plan developed by the Expert Group meeting

earlier and endorsed by the ministers, now form the basis of future action for accelerating improvement of the CRVS systems in the region.

4.2.7 Action Plan for Africa of the Global Strategy for Improving Agricultural Statistics

The Global Strategy for Improving Agricultural Statistics was endorsed in February 2010 by the United Nations Statistical Commission in order to respond to: (a) the declining quantity and quality of agricultural statistics in developing countries, (b) new data requirements to inform policy on emerging development issues such as food vs. bio-fuels, global warming, environment, and food security, and (c) the requirement for the data systems to be harmonized and integrated to achieve synergy and cost-effectiveness.

Partly because agricultural statistics remains one of the weakest aspects of official statistics in Africa, Africa was the first region to initiate the implementation of the Global Strategy. The Action Plan for Africa of the Global Strategy was designed by the AfDB, UNECA and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Plan comprises three technical components – technical assistance, training and research - as well as a governance mechanism and a comprehensive and detailed country assessment, which should form the basis for the three technical components.

The expected outcomes (impact) of the Action Plan include:

- Increased number of African countries able to produce and use a minimum core food and agricultural data set to meet the current and emerging statistical demands of the various stakeholders, such as farmers, households, countries, national and international organizations;
- More countries with agriculture integrated into the National Statistical Systems in order to meet the expectations of policy maker and other data user with regard to the comparability of data across countries and over time. This will ensure effective coordination between the National Statistical Offices and other data producers, including Ministries of Agriculture; and
- Improved policy and decision-making as well as accountability engendered by improved availability and better use of good statistics and indicators.

At the official launch of the Global Strategy in Rome, Italy in December 2012, the progress made by Africa in the implementation of the Global Strategy was very much appreciated. The progress was reported to include consolidation, printing, translated into French and distribution of the Action Plan document; establishment of the governance structure including a Regional Steering Committee under the high level stewardship of the Chief Economist of AfDB, appointment of Coordinator of the Action Plan; holding of the Steering Committee meeting; launching and training workshops on the Action Plan in general, and on the country assessment process of country needs and capacities in particular; and the ongoing country assessment data compilation whose results are in the course of 2013. The role of the AfDB in the whole process was noted and appreciated. Other regions were eager to learn from Africa's experience. There was also a lot of interest in the web-based tool which AfDB has developed for countries to report data to AfDB – other regions are using EXCEL spread sheet.

4.2.8 Infrastructure statistics

In 2009, the World Bank, in collaboration with AfDB and other partners, undertook the Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic (AICD), an ambitious project to analyse the cost of redressing the infrastructure deficit in 24 African countries, based on country-level information on various dimensions of infrastructure needs.

The successor programme to AICD has been developed and covers the period 2010-2016. The implementation strategy involves activities to be undertaken by the stakeholders. In 2011 the AIKP Handbook on Infrastructure Statistics was prepared, endorsed by the Expert Group Meeting organized by AfDB in April 2011 and is ready for publication. It was presented to StatCom-Africa in January 2012. Many activities have been planned under AICD including: data collection, validation and analysis workshops; and generation of country reports and knowledge products on infrastructure.

The AfDB infrastructure statistics initiative under the Africa Infrastructure Knowledge Programme (AIKP), seeks to improve the infrastructure knowledge base to help monitor the impact of increased investment in the sector. The initiative represents an unprecedented effort to collect detailed economic and technical data on African infrastructure relating to the fiscal costs of each sector, future sector investment needs, and sector performance indicators. The AIKP has a long-term perspective and provides a framework for generating knowledge on infrastructure on a more sustainable basis.

4.2.9 Increasing emphasis on statistical value chain

For a long time, undue emphasis was placed by the statistical community in Africa on data collection, and more data collection. There is now a more balanced approach to provision of statistics and statistical services that addresses the entire statistical value chain that cascades from identifying user needs to data collection, archiving, analysis, dissemination and eventual use. The downstream links in this value chain have been the weakest.

There is increasing awareness in the statistical community about the need to better organize data and to make them available to users. In many countries now, greater attention is placed on data analysis and especially policy-related data analysis. Where analytical capacity is limited at the NSO, there is collaboration with data analysts and researchers in different ministries of government who are increasingly being called upon to add value to data by undertaking more detailed and often policy related data analysis.

The said collaboration has been enhanced by increased release of microdata to serious researchers. Where national statistical legislations did not provide for this, they have or are being amended to allow release of microdata to researchers. This has gone hand in hand with microdata archiving that is now taking place in countries in context of the ADP. In addition to addressing the challenge of conducting censuses in Africa, the African Census Analysis Project was launched in Pretoria, South Africa. The Project has successfully retrieved and archived data from several past African censuses and these census data should be available for research. Moreover, the African Integrated Census MicroData (AICMD) web site has been launched at the African

Centre for Statistics at the UNECA, through which 51,524,324 person records are freely available to researchers and policymakers, thanks to IPUMS³ that supplied all the microdata and all the technology. By simply registering and agreeing to the conditions of user license such as protection of statistical confidentiality, and sharing research results, researchers can download and use the desired datasets.

4.2.10 Sharing of knowledge, best practices and experiences

Many opportunities have been created to enable statistical personnel in Africa share knowledge and experience. They include the following, among others:

Workshops and seminars

Pan-African organizations and other development partners have organized regional capacity building workshops at continental and regional levels on various statistical areas. These workshops and seminars have also been used to share knowledge, best practice and experiences among African countries.

Statistical Journal

The African Statistical Journal was established in 2005 to promote the understanding of statistical development in the African region. It is published and distributed by the AfDB. It focuses on issues related to official statistics as well as application of statistical methodologies to solve practical problems of general interest to applied statisticians. Of particular interest will be exposition of: how statistics can help to illuminate development and public policy issues like poverty, gender, environment, energy, HIV/AIDS, etc.; development of statistical literacy; tracking national and regional development agenda; development of statistical capacities and effective national statistical systems; and the development of sectoral statistics e.g. educational statistics, health statistics, agricultural statistics, etc. In addition to individual academic and practicing statisticians, the Journal should be of great interest to a number of organizations in the region including NSOs, Central Banks, research and training institutions and sub-regional economic groupings, and international development agencies.

The Journal serves as a research outlet and information sharing publication among statisticians and users of statistical information mainly in the African region. It publishes, among other things: articles of an expository or review nature that demonstrate the vital role of statistics to society rather than present technical materials, articles on statistical methodologies with special emphasis on applications, articles about good practices and lessons learned in statistical development in the region, opinions on issues of general interest to the statistical community and users of statistical information in the African region, notices and announcements on upcoming events, conferences, calls for papers, and recent statistical developments and anything that may be of interest to the statistical community in the region.

³ *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), University of Minnesota Population Center, USA*

African Statistical Newsletter

The African Statistical newsletter aims to supplement the efforts of the African Statistical Journal to provide a platform for sharing knowledge and information about statistical methodologies and their application to solve practical problems in Africa. It covers all activities and news deemed to be of interest to the African statistical community, ranging from statistical advocacy to institutional development including capacity building and technical assistance, to specific statistical activities like censuses and surveys.

The Newsletter is intended for the statistical community, across the whole of Africa as well as development practitioners with an interest in Africa's development. The Newsletter is a quarterly periodical published four times a year. Issues are generally released within two weeks after the last day of the quarter. It is produced by the African Centre for Statistics and official statisticians in African are encouraged to subscribe to it.

Communities of practice- data archiving

A number of Africa countries have given priority to the preservation and mining of microdata. In order to promote inter-country/continent data exchanges and harmonization, a community of practice was established in 2008 to bring together experts in the documentation and archiving of statistical data. The African Association of Statistical Data Archivists (Association Africaine Pour L' Archivage Des Données Statistiques) has been founded to provide a forum for collegial support in achieving this important goal. The 1st meeting of the association was held in Cape Town, South Africa (10th – 12th April 2008) (Kizito Kasozi, 2008).

There are plans to establish other communities of practice on such areas as agricultural statistics, gender statistics, etc.

4.2.11 Other initiatives

Other noteworthy initiatives include:

- The Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity Building in Africa was designed in 2006 to provide strategic directions and appropriate mechanisms for guiding and accelerating the development of sustainable statistical capacity in Africa for managing for results, and for implementing the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics in the continent.
- Various actions on gender statistics as a result of which a number of NSOs have recruited gender specialists onto their staff, gender issues and concerns have been built into statistical programmes and activities, and better data analysis that brings out gender dimensions is increasingly being done on African data.
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF): Africa Regional Technical Assistance Centers (East, West, and Central AFRITACs) which allow for prompt response in dealing with requests from member countries, while bringing to bear a deep knowledge of local context. Another key aspect is the development of local counterpart teams, which helps to

contribute significantly to country ownership, promotes sustainability of the underlying reform effort, and leads to the creation of a future pool of national and regional expertise

- African Group on Statistical Training to coordinate various initiatives on statistical training in Africa. AGROST also brings together statistical trainers and the users of statistics as a way of improving statistical training.
- ISibalo (Young Statisticians Programme) as a flagship and Africa's legacy program of the 57th Session of the ISI established by Statistics South Africa that involves statistical literacy beginning with schools, promoting and empowering young statisticians and women in Africa, etc. the program is very much looking to the future of statistics in Africa.

4.3 Streamlined statistical governance

4.3.1 Need for enhanced statistical governance

It is now widely recognized that the effectiveness of statistics statistical data and services is enhanced not just by addressing technical and financial issues (financial issues tend to be overstated) but, and perhaps more importantly, by addressing governance issues – issues of leadership and management. At various levels, effective leadership and management is necessary to address the 21st century institutional and organizational challenges such as globalization, fast-paced technological change, rising expectations of customers (citizens, public and private sector, etc), increasing diversity in societies, the need for performance-focused organizations and the need for managing networked organizations; and also to crucially, to carefully manage the relationships (and sometimes tensions) between statistics, government/organizations and politics.

In the recent past, deliberate efforts have been made to streamline statistical governance in Africa following a well articulated global statistical governance. In a paper commissioned by the African Statistical Coordination Committee ⁴, a mapping of African governance mechanism was attempted. The mapping presents different layers of governance (policy, forums, coordination and statistical structures) at different levels – international, continental, regional and national - and the linkages among them as can be seen in the following figure. This was done to bring different stakeholders appreciate the roles played by stakeholders in statistical development at different levels.

4.3.2 Policy

The following summary gives policy organs that affect the course of statistical development at various levels:

⁴ *Room paper accompanying document E/ECA/COE/30/13 and AU/CAMEF/EXP/13(VI) presented at the Fourth Joint Annual Meetings of the AU Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development in March 2011.*

Level	Policy organ
Global	UN General Assembly: <i>provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the UN Charter. Statistics as an enabler for development is also discussed at this level</i>
Continental	African Union (AU) Summit of Heads of State and Government & Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development: <i>take political and policy decisions on statistics and related matters.</i>
Regional Economic Community	Heads of Heads Member States & Councils of Ministers: <i>take political and policy decisions on statistics and related matters</i>
National	Cabinet, Minister responsible for statistics, Statistics Boards and Councils: <i>make policy decisions on statistical matters</i>

4.3.3 Forums

The following are inter-governmental forums established at various levels for statistical development:

Level	Forum
Global	UN Statistical Commission: <i>apex entity of the global statistical system responsible for normative functions, championing statistics in the UN system, coordinating the international statistical system, promoting the development of national statistical systems worldwide.</i>
Continental	Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa): <i>apex inter-governmental body in charge of statistics and statistical development in Africa.</i> Committee of Director Generals: <i>promoting statistical development in support of integration agenda</i>
Regional Economic Community	Meeting of Director Generals: <i>deliberate on issues of statistics and statistical development in the REC</i>
National	National Statistics Committees (User-Producer, Producer-Producer): <i>deliberate on statistical development in a country</i>

4.3.4 Coordination

Coordination of statistical work at every level is important to achieve synergy, cost-effectiveness and improvements in statistical quality. Coordination structures are summarized below:

Level	Coordinating body
Global	Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities : <i>promote coordination, integration and complementarity among the statistical programmes of the international organizations</i>
Continental	African Statistical Coordination Committee: <i>coordinates statistical work of pan-African organizations</i>
Regional Economic Community	Statistics Committee: <i>provide policy and strategic guidance to the implementation of the REC's statistical programmes and projects</i>

National National Statistics Office: coordinate statistical activities in the country

4.3.5 Statistical Structures

Once policies, strategies and programmes are designed, they have to be implemented. Structures that implement them at different levels include the following:

Level	Structure
Global	UN Statistics Division: <i>permanent secretariat of both the UN Statistical Commission & Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities, compiles and disseminates global statistical information, develops standards and norms for statistical activities, and supports countries' efforts to strengthen their national statistical systems.</i>
Continental	Statistics Division at African Union, Statistics Department at the African Development Bank & African Centre for Statistics at the UN Economic Commission for Africa: <i>implement statistical programmes of pan-African organizations</i>
Regional Economic Community	Statistics Department or Statistics Unit: <i>responsible for statistical programmes and projects</i> Afristat: <i>harmonisation of concepts, standards and methods in 19 African member countries</i>
National	National Statistics Office: <i>main government agency responsible for official statistics</i> Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies: <i>collect data in areas of their mandate</i>

4.3.6 Strengthening the statistical function at pan-African organizations

A key element in the statistical renaissance in Africa has been the strengthening of the statistical function at the pan-African organizations which play a crucial role in statistical development in Africa. This was done in response to the repeated stakeholder demands to address the issue of statistical underdevelopment in Africa and also in response to the recommendation by the RRSF for these organizations to be strengthened first before they can play their role more effectively. In context of the assessment of the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Plan for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s undertaken in 2000, the pan-African organizations were indicted for giving statistics low priority in their programmes. The AfDB had a small Statistics Division, AUC had a little Statistics Unit and the UNECA had abolished its Statistics Division as part of the UN-wide restructuring exercise. This had deleterious effect on regional statistical programme that the division had been implementing in 1980s and 1990s including the African Census Programme, the African Household Survey Capability Programme (AHSCP), the National Accounts Capability Programme, the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA) and the Statistical Development Programme for Africa. Incidentally, following the success of the AHSCP, the programme was extended to other regions and established at global level as the United Nations National Household Survey Capability Programme.

In 2006, the AfDB enhanced its statistical function by upgrading the Statistics Division to a full-fledged Statistics Department with two divisions, one dealing with economic and social statistics, and the other with statistical capacity building, making the organization one of the major providers of support for statistical capacity building on the continent. The AfDB capacity building programmes have been highlighted above. At the AU, a Statistics Unit in recent past been upgraded to a Division within the Department of Economic Affairs. This Division has led the effort in developing the African Charter on Statistics and the design of the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSa)

At the UNECA, the Statistics Division was re-established under the name African Centre for Statistics as part of the UNECA repositioning to serve Africa better. This Centre is also the secretariat of the Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa), the apex inter-governmental body established by the UNECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development in April 2007 and other regional statistical initiatives. The latest realignment of the UNECA culminated in mid-December 2012 in the up scaling of statistical activities at ECA making the ACS the biggest division of the repositioned ECA with five sections, namely Economic Statistics and National Accounts; Demographic and Social Statistics; Statistical Development; Geo-Information and Sectoral Statistics; and Data Technology. In addition, each of the five ECA Sub Regional Offices includes a Sub Regional Data Centre collecting information and building the capacity of member States in different areas of statistics. This is a result of the recognition of statistics as an important cross-cutting theme, which was considered vital to advancing the special needs of African countries, particularly in respect of NEPAD and monitoring and evaluation of progress made towards reaching agreed upon development targets including the MDGs.

Not only were statistical functions weak at the said organizations but also they designed and executed their programmes in uncoordinated manner. For instance, every year, the AfDB and UNECA produced separate African Statistical Yearbooks often with conflicting data. However, all this has changed since 2006 and as was mentioned earlier, there is now joint programming and execution of statistical activities in the continent.

4.3.7 African voice at the UN Statistical Commission sessions

For a long time, participation of Africa in the UN Statistical Commission was marginal. However, the last decade has seen a significant increase in the participation of African countries in the UNSC sessions. From 7 countries in 2000, the number of African countries that attended the UNSC sessions rose to 17, and 33 in 2005 and 2010 respectively. The participation being secured, the next step was to ensure an effective contribution to the deliberations of this apex global body on statistical development.

In 2008, Africa became the first region to make a substantive presentation to the UNSC on statistical development in the region. Other regions have followed suit. Through StatCom-Africa, deliberate efforts have been made to prepare member States and to encourage countries to fully participate in international working groups, Inter Secretariat and Working Groups (ISWGs), Inter Agency and Working Groups (IAEGs), and City Groups, etc. The African region has since 2009 ensured that there are consultations between African countries and international organizations to

ensure proper representation and benefit from various meetings. In addition, a meeting of the StatCom-Africa is organized the Saturday preceding the Commission in New York to fine tune the interventions and potential common positions, if any. To ensure this, the Bureau of StatCom-Africa in collaboration with the secretariat identifies potential issues to be tabled during the current session on which Africa should concentrate in preparation of the following one. These issues are then distributed to relevant StatCom-Africa working groups to work out potential common positions and prepare interventions for countries attending the subsequent UNSC session. The above process applies to any other contribution in international *fora* constituting an “*African voice*”.

4. Conclusions

Africa still faces challenges of statistical development. These challenges are systemic and mutually reinforcing, and they are best resolved using holistic, strategic and integrated approaches. In the last decade or so, pan-African organizations, regional economic communities and countries themselves have galvanized themselves and are facing these challenges squarely. Institutional strengthening is taking place e.g. legal frameworks are being strengthened to enhance the integrity of official statistics and to upgrade the status of NSOs; organizations are being strengthened at continental, regional and country level; more capacity is being built, and more resources are being made available not only from the development partners but crucially by national governments (although more needs to be done in this area); frameworks, strategies and action plans have been designed and are being implemented; statistical governance has been streamlined from continental down to country level; there is more partnership and collaboration at different levels; countries are improving the design and/or implementation of their NSDSs; and Africa’s voice is being heard in international meetings. All this has led to improvements in statistical systems in Africa – there has been an increase in data quantity, quality, timeliness and use. It is appreciated that countries are revising their GDP in a transparent manner and releasing the results. The current initiative to help countries revise their GDP and CPI using sound approaches and in a transparent fashion is expected to contribute to further improvements in statistics in the countries.

This narrative cannot be a description of a “statistical tragedy in Africa” which, in any case, was so declared using existing data selectively; it can surely only be a description of a “statistical renaissance”, hence the Afro-statistical optimism expressed in this paper. This optimism is crucial for maintaining and supporting the momentum that has been generated for statistical improvement and development in Africa in the last decade or so.

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