

# The Importance of Statistics as a Basis for Effective Policy-making in Africa

Speech by His Excellency Paul Kagame  
President of the Republic of Rwanda  
Kigali, Intercontinental Hotel, January 15<sup>th</sup> 2007

Your Excellencies, Heads of Rwandan Higher Institutions  
Mr Abdoulei Jannah, Executive Secretary of UNECA  
Honourable Ana Dias Lourenco, Minister for Planning, Republic of Angola  
Heads of National Statistical Offices  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin my remarks by acknowledging the important role played by the United States Economic Commission for Africa, and the Government of South Africa, for spearheading the strengthening of Africa's statistical capabilities. I also thank Honourable Ana Dias Lourenco, Minister for Planning, the Republic of Angola for joining us today in this important meeting on statistical development on our continent.

For our continent to transform we must build a strong statistical basis – and so this ongoing endeavour is vital indeed.

It is my pleasure to address the “2007 Africa Symposium on statistical Development”. This important meeting, I am told, is to review preparations for a complete enumeration of the African Population during the 2010 round of Population and Housing censuses.

I have no doubt that you will have a fruitful symposium and valuable discussions that will in turn enable our continent to successfully undertake Population and Housing Censuses as envisaged.

Besides the census rounds, however, I believe that this is an important forum for discussion of improving policy-making on our continent, more specifically, the imperative of basing the process on robust evidence. My remarks this morning focus on the importance of statistics, and generally evidence-based policy-making in Africa, an area that, I am afraid, still leaves a lot to be desired on our continent.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Let us consider for a moment what is “evidence-based policy-making”. In simple terms, evidence-based policy-making is a means by which policies and programmes intended to improve lives are based on clearly defined, time-bound, and measurable milestones. This allows timely modification,

consolidation or change of policy as the case may require, thus ensuring urgent response to challenges. It is in this context that statistics become part and parcel of 'evidence-based' policy-making, statistics understood here to mean more than a routine collection and storage of numbers, but rather as credible and scientifically derived evidence intended to evaluate the impact of policy-making.

That is why national offices charged with producing official statistics must be capacitated for greater effectiveness and efficiency. These offices must be empowered to utilize modern methods of gathering evidence for good policy-making, including issue-based demand-driven surveys, dedicated and timely conducted censuses, tailor-made research, cost/benefit analysis, economic modeling, forecasts and projections. These constitute different tools for planning, measuring and monitoring development policy outcomes, all of which share one important element: reliable statistics upon which policy development and management depend.

How do we get there? The first step is to abandon previous approaches to policy-making that essentially did not deliver quality services to African people. These approaches, generally operating in poor governance environments, were influenced, for example, by personal gain, powerful interests, or purely ideological considerations that were simply not people-centred.

It can be stated that, the noted approaches to policy-making disregarded the utility of statistics altogether. We must make a decisive break with this past. I put it to you that this is the very reason why we are here today: an assembly of African statisticians to explore practical ways and means of reinforcing our national statistical agencies and systems so as to provide the foundation for evidence-based policy-making.

In our case in Rwanda, we are determined to engender a statistics culture that must place us on an effective path of evidence-based policy-making. That is why we are reinforcing our national statistics agency and systems that incorporate not only central, but all levels of Government. We must accelerate our agenda of building Ministerial planning, monitoring, and evaluation units by equipping them with professionals, as well as with infrastructural capacity, to enable them to become the basis of evidence-based policy-making. There is no other basis for executing, monitoring, and evaluating the work we do as leaders or professionals in public service.



## YOUR EXCELLENCIES,

If we form consensus here in Kigali that evidence-based policy-making is urgently required, and that statistical capacities are the basis, we must address at this symposium two related critical issues:

First, we must continue to probe why current capacities of Africa's statistics agencies and systems remain weak. Second, we have to propose how to formulate and implement an achievable agenda of re-positioning our national statistics agencies and systems in order to support evidence-based policymaking in Africa. Most importantly, a strategy of training a critical mass of statisticians is vital, if we are to make evidence-based policy-making a reality on the continent. We are not only talking of professional statisticians in central statistics bureaus; rather, a whole range of policy makers, business operators, civil society, and indeed, engendering a culture of statistics across the board.

It is in this sense that decision makers in central Ministries or local government, have to abandon anecdotal approaches in the execution of their daily responsibilities. We must also begin to address the generally inadequate state of infrastructure on our continent, including limited use of frames and ICT in scientific sampling methods, data collection, data quality, analysis, and dissemination of official statistics.

With regard to the Kigali meeting, I urge you to reflect on why previous efforts on statistical capacity building have not led to desired outcomes.

## DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

In your discussions at this Kigali symposium, you must appreciate the imperative of national ownership of policy-making and development management. It is my view that only when national governments and domestic stakeholders take charge of policy management, will effective developmental results become realized. This is also true of statistical capacities. I am told, for example, that there is almost no single African country that does not depend on some "donated" statistics from development agencies.

The burning questions are: Where are such data collected from that national governments do not have access to? Why does this dependency persist? Statistical capacity building must, therefore, become a national, regional, and continental priority anchored in the broader attempt at policy-ownership, as well as evidence-based policy-making. At the end of this symposium, we expect well-thought out resolutions that should guide us

as we build strong statistical institutions and systems on our continent. In this sense, we ought to challenge ourselves to draw lessons and good practices from within the continent and beyond. It is critical that we incorporate lessons into building our statistical systems – and urgently, as opposed to participating in annual meetings that cover the same issues and same grounds. We should devise practical and effective strategies on how the Kigali resolutions can add significant value to Africa's statistics agencies and systems.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you a productive meeting and I thank you for your attention.