

Have Africa's Statistical Voice Heard : How to Prepare Africa's Contribution to International Statistical Conferences, Meetings and Working Groups

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Abstract

Compared with the other regions, the voice of Africa is particularly weak in the international conferences and working-groups that deal with statistical methods and standards development. Making it louder will require a thorough assessment on the way a strong African technical contribution can be built, validated within the region, conveyed to the international bodies concerned and advocated by experienced African experts. This paper proposes an approach for preparing a strategic report on ways and means to organize an effective African contribution to international statistical forums. The proposition that is made builds on successive and inter-related steps that will lead to (i) identifying the priority themes and needs where to focus, (ii) inventorying the existing related technical working groups, (iii) reviewing the organization of the African statistical system, and (iv) addressing related issues such as the reinforcement of African research and exchange in statistics as well as knowledge sharing.

Key Words: *Statistical coordination, African voice, International statistical conferences, Working groups, City groups, Statistical systems, Regional and sub-regional organizations, African statistical expertise*

Résumé

Comparativement aux autres régions, la voix de l'Afrique est particulièrement faible dans les conférences internationales et les groupes de travail qui traitent du développement de méthodes et normes statistiques. La rendre plus audible nécessite une évaluation complète de la façon dont une contribution technique africaine forte peut être établie, validée dans la région, transférée aux structures internationales concernées et défendue par des experts africains expérimentés. Cet article propose une approche pour préparer un rapport stratégique sur les voies et moyens d'organiser une contribution africaine efficace aux forums statistiques internationaux. La proposition qui est faite se base sur les étapes successives et interconnectées qui conduiront à (i) l'identification des thèmes et des besoins prioritaires où se focaliser, (ii) l'inventaire des groupes de travail techniques existants y relatifs, (iii) la révision de l'organisation du système statistique

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africain, et (iv) aborder les questions y relatives telles que le renforcement de la recherche et des échanges africains dans le domaine statistique aussi bien que le partage de la connaissance.

Mots clés : *Coordination statistique, Voix africaine, Conférences statistiques internationales, Groupes de travail, City-groups, Systèmes statistiques, Organisations régionales et sous-régionales, Expertise statistique africaine*

1. BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, the demand for quality and timely statistics has tremendously increased in the African countries. This phenomenon was mainly emphasized by the launching of global or regional initiatives, such as the Millennium Development Goals, the New Partnership for Africa's development, as well as Poverty Reduction Strategies, given their sizeable data needs. The monitoring of these initiatives requires reliable and comparable statistics to be collected, processed and disseminated, yet statistics meant for national purposes are not always relevant for international monitoring and vice versa. This is a real concern in an environment of data paucity and scarcity associated with regional specificities.

The socio-economic situation in Africa is as special as its statistical development needs. There is a need to adapt international standards and norms to African specific features and circumstances to ensure that recommended statistical operations are effective and realistic: effective in terms of capturing properly African realities and realistic in relation to resource constraints. Very many examples can be cited to justify the need for more tailor-made statistical methods and tools. Some international methods recommended for price data collection for the construction of consumer price indices prove difficult to implement in market conditions where goods and services are not sold in standard quantities and where the price of the same item in the same market place can greatly fluctuate during the day for reasons which do not seem to support economic theory on consumer or seller rationality. The notion of household is another example of conceptual problem which may need to be addressed to make household surveys better capture processes and flows related to decision, production, labour, income sharing, consumption and dwelling in most African countries. These issues should be discussed and agreed at the African level and submitted to the relevant international forums with a view to reaching

global understanding and consensus on their inclusion in international systems.

However, African participation in international meetings where standards, methodologies and classifications are discussed and approved is rather weak. This absence frequently results in African specificities not being properly accommodated in international systems, which further leads to the latter being sometimes questioned within an African context. The issue here is to suggest a way of increasing the African participation and improving technical contribution to international forums (meetings, working groups, etc.)

Before going into more details, it is important to discuss some terminology that will be used in this paper:

- **“Discussion and revision process”** are those meant to support the international development of statistical norms, methods, standards. A non exhaustive list of these processes is shown in Annex.
- **“Systems”** consist in all bodies and institutions (international, regional, sub-regional, national organizations) exchanging in the framework of different types of working groups, each of them having a specific mandate. The system we are referring to here should not be mixed up with the term “Statistical System”, which corresponds to the grouping of statistical actors in a given geographic area (national, sub-regional or regional).
- **“Leading body”** stands for an organization leading a process and coordinating the relevant system. Leading bodies are generally international organizations (World Bank, UN agencies, IMF, OECD...). City Groups, in their advisory capacity, can also be considered as leading bodies for specific statistical themes.

These concepts apply for any geographical level: international, regional, sub-regional and national.

As an illustration of the above, the proposed terminology applies for the ongoing “2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme” as follows: this is an international *discussion and revision process* aiming at developing methods and concepts to support the implementation of population censuses. The *leading body* is the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). This process is – or should be – supported by international, regional, sub-regional, national systems. Each *system* involves a wide range of actors that gather in different types of meetings (at international level:

expert group meetings, UN expert group meetings; at regional level: symposia, workshops; at sub-regional level: sub-regional workshops; etc....). Each meeting has a specific mandate and is expected to deliver specific outcomes.

This process, supported by integrated systems at each geographical level, needs to be downstream and upstream interlinked. While it is useful to learn about the main modus operandi of the ongoing and envisaged processes, an analysis of the whole fabric thereof is an enormous work and may not be always relevant in the African context. This learning process is the first step in the implementation of mechanisms aimed at making Africa's voice louder and more effective in international debates on statistical recommendations.

The aim of this article is to initiate a discussion on these mechanisms. To achieve this goal, we suggest a three-step approach to be developed: first the drafting of a concept note (this article can serve this purpose); second the conduct of a specific study; and third the implementation of the recommendations emanating from the study.

2. PROBLEM UNDERSTANDING

A stepwise approach should be followed through closely interlinked steps. The first step consists in identifying priority statistical areas related to major development issues and to decide as whether they need to benefit from international discussion and revisions processes. The latter will be defined in terms of their composition, their functioning, their agenda and work programmes. All these elements may be different depending on the statistical issues to be addressed, the process types and the related systems.

The second step is about analyzing for each process and corresponding system:

- The downstream/upstream integration of the discussion and revision processes as well as the relationships between systems and their coordination mechanisms;
- The participation of African – national, sub-regional or regional – representatives in international meetings: method of selection, mandate, means of financing, regional or sub-regional legitimacy, how a common African position is prepared, and technical contribution.

The third step aims to ensure the sustainability of the systems supporting discussion and revision processes. It entails identifying African institutions, groups or individuals that can act as focal points for:

- Formulating national/regional specificities and views;
- Consolidating them into a common African position; and
- Relaying the common position to the appropriate international body.

Existing regional and sub-regional bodies that can play such a role must be identified and their strengths and weaknesses assessed. The same approach will be applied to already operational regional and sub-regional technical working groups. In the case of identified gaps (this is a critical issue for Africa), the study could propose the creation of new regional and sub-regional technical working groups or review the terms of reference of existing working groups; consultancy assignments, etc...

The success of this operation hinges on the identification of appropriate expertise, at the right time and within the right bodies, to prepare the African position. There are many high level statistical experts in Africa; the question is how to identify the ones needed and how to empower them in terms of granting them the required legitimacy to prepare and defend the African position. Also, there are some basic principles to be followed in the approach.

3. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

We propose that the following basic principles should be considered in the study:

- Avoid duplication. There are already several on-going initiatives in the development of statistics in Africa and different actors are involved. It is essential to consider what exists and to avoid re-inventing the wheel. An important effort should thus be put in assessing the existing mechanisms and the strengths and weaknesses of the various partners. The existing coordination framework (the Statistical Commission for Africa – Statcom-Africa – and the African Statistical Coordination Committee -ASCC) is expected to facilitate the assessment.
- Be realistic and sustainable. It is essential to prepare proposals that build on a solid ground and that have a chance to succeed. There will be a need to mobilize high caliber African consultants who have proven experience in statistical development in the region and in

international discussion and revision processes. They will help validate the conclusions and recommendations emanating from the study,

- Articulation with the UN fundamental principles of official statistics.

4. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study is to propose a strategic report aiming at identifying the best ways and means (existing or to be created) to organize and/or improve the African contribution to international statistical development. This should lead to greater consideration being given to Africa needs and priorities in rules, norms and methods being developed at the international level.

5. EXPECTED RESULTS

The objective of the study will be achieved through three successive and inter-related results:

- First, an inventory of the existing discussion and revision processes and related systems will be carried out and their respective functioning will be analyzed. This will be done for various statistical areas deemed critical for statistical development in Africa;
- Second, a review of the organization of the statistical system in Africa, its structure, the partners involved (at regional, sub-regional and national levels) and their respective roles. Particular emphasis will be put on its current or potential contribution to discussion and revision processes. This should heavily leverage on the RRSF material and monitoring process, as well as on the ASCC work. Also, comparisons with other regional systems will be made in order to identify operational and organizational benchmarks,
- Third, recommendations will be made for the organization of consultations, technical meetings and consultancy activities to prepare an African contribution that is relevant for international statistical conferences, meetings and working groups.

5.1. Inventory of discussion and revision processes, and related systems; analysis of their functioning in relation to selected African statistical priorities

There are many ongoing discussion and revision processes supported by many international, regional and sub-regional systems, with many actors involved in various technical working groups to discuss international methodological development in statistics. Some of them are listed in Annex. This list, once completed, together with the list of African statistical priorities, should be discussed at the African level prior to starting the inventory work of processes that are the most relevant for Africa. A clear understanding of those processes, their supporting systems, and their agenda is a prerequisite for the study. A particular attention will also be paid to assessing the upstream and downstream linkages within the systems.

5.2. Review of Africa's potential contribution to discussion and revisions processes and related systems and comparison with other regions

A specific objective of the study is to propose recommendations aimed at creating or leveraging on existing technical groups to ensure a sound and coordinated African contribution at international level. Out of the 15 main working groups established under the ASCC or StatCom-Africa, 8 are related to specific economic or social sectors. These are: the International comparison programme for Africa (ICP-Africa); Measuring and Fostering Progress of African Societies; Gender Statistics; Development Indicators; National Accounts; Measurement of the Informal Sector; Price statistics; and Financial statistics. Comprehensive terms of reference of these working groups should be prepared and submitted to the relevant oversight body (ASCC or StatCom-Africa) for approval.

Some existing effective experiences could be helpful for the design of a benchmark against which to compare and to evaluate the situation in Africa, as well as for the preparation of the terms of reference of the working groups. The benchmark will also allow assessing the global and operational relevance of the proposals that could be made through the study. The European and/or the Caribbean statistical integration processes could be analyzed and could serve as basis for the benchmark.

5.3. **Recommendations to organize consultations, technical meetings and consultancy activities to prepare an African contribution that is relevant for international statistical conferences, meetings and working groups**

This third result will consist in putting together realistic and sustainable proposals to improve the institutional involvement of Africa in international processes and systems, to reach a coordinated and solid African technical contribution, to mobilize the right expertise.

6. **PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**

The above will require the following activities.

To achieve result 1, the following activities are proposed:

1.1. Desk and research work aiming at **analyzing relevant statistics for the monitoring of global initiatives such as MDG, NEPAD, PRS**, etc. The statistical scope of the study should be defined by selecting statistical themes that have the highest level of priority for the region and on which the study should concentrate.

Outcome: *List of statistical priority themes*

1.2. Based on the list of priorities selected through activity 1.1., the study will identify **the relevant (ongoing or to be launched) discussion and revision processes and supporting systems, and leading bodies** at international, regional, sub-regional and, potentially, national level. Some detailed desk and research work will be carried out on the mandate and functioning of each system.

Outcome: *Mapping of the existing or to be launched discussion and revision processes and supporting systems; Description of their functioning, of their future objectives and their upstream and downstream connections.*

1.3. In the context of the study, information on the work programmes and calendars of ongoing and future methodological developments should be collected. This will include the dates/periods of future methodological meetings. Also, it is recommended to identify tools to be used to ensure that relevant information is accessible to the African region on a regular and timely basis.

Outcome: *Timetable of processes and related meetings where methodological statistical development in the African priority areas will be discussed; and outlines of a tool guaranteeing regular exchange of information*

To achieve result 2, the following activities are proposed:

2.1. For the analysis of the African context

2.1.1. The assessment should focus on sub-regional bodies that support statistics in Africa (Afristat; statistical units/divisions of sub-regional economic communities. It will also cover some African National Statistical Institutes that are especially active in regional and international discussion and revision processes and related systems. The assessment will also address the coordination mechanisms at regional and sub-regional level. **Missions to sub-regional and national statistical offices** previously identified should be organized to meet and discuss with people in charge of statistical development and coordination and professionals active in regional and international statistical forums.

Outcome: *Description of the functioning of the African Statistical System from a sub-regional perspective; Mapping and description of the African participation in the discussion and revision processes and related systems (from sub-regional and national perspectives); Description of existing sub-regional coordination mechanisms.*

2.1.2. It is also proposed to carry out **missions to regional offices** (African Center for Statistics at ECA, African Development Bank, ACBF, the African Statistical Coordination Committee, the African Union Commission...), to assess their involvement in discussion and revision processes and related systems, the existing coordination mechanisms between those regional, sub-regional and national bodies. Alternatively, the most could be made of any existing reports on these issues.

Outcome: *Description of the functioning of the African Statistical System from a regional perspective; Mapping and description of the African participation in the discussion and revision processes and related systems (from regional perspective); Description of existing regional coordination mechanisms.*

2.1.3. It is proposed to use **contacts/missions to international bodies** (UNSD, IMF, City Group secretariats, OECD) to assess, from an

international point of view, the African participation in discussion and revision processes and the potential means to improve this contribution both at institutional and technical levels.

Outcome: *Mapping and description of the African contribution in discussion and revision systems (from an international perspective)*

- 2.1.4 In addition to the above, another aspect to be addressed is the issue of human resources necessary to improve and sustain the African statistical systems and their contribution to international meetings and conferences. It's mainly about identifying and mobilizing African statisticians likely to contribute to the technical debates in the sub-region, the region and at the international level. This can leverage on similar work being carried out by the African Center for Statistics.

Outcome: *Terms of reference for an African expertise roster and launching of this roster.*

2.2. For the comparison with other regions

Each region is specific in itself as is (and has been) the organization and the development of its statistical system. However, even if all the good practices cannot be replicated as such, lessons can be drawn that can help design relevant and useful benchmark. It is thus proposed to analyze statistical systems in two regions: Europe and the Caribbean.

- 2.2.1. **Contacts with Eurostat, an “old” and a “new” Member States National Statistical Institutes** are proposed, to collect information on the lessons learnt from past and recent integration processes, and particularly the means used (i) to strengthen relations between a regional statistical office and member National Statistical Institutes and (ii) to ensure that European and international statistical developments take into account national specificities.

- 2.2.2. It is proposed to establish **contacts and conduct missions to other European and International organizations, such as UNSD, UNECE, OECD**, which, jointly with Eurostat, are active in statistical developments. This would allow to assess the effectiveness of the coordination mechanisms among those organizations and their respective contributions to the discussions and development of statistics at the international level. However, most desired information can be downloaded from the relevant web-sites.

2.2.3. **Desk work** will be carried out to analyze, to a lesser extent than for the European case, the more recent integration process that is going on in the Caribbean. This will be an opportunity to comfort or to reject the potential of good practices already identified from the European exercise but maybe to also identify new ones that could be interesting for the African context.

2.2.4. We further propose to use **contacts/missions to international leading bodies** (UNSD, IMF, City group secretariats) to assess, from an international point of view, the European and Caribbean contributions to international statistical development.

Outcome: *Report on the European/Caribbean experiences and good practices*

2.3 For the contrasting of the African situation with the other regions

On the basis of the analysis of the outcomes from activities 2.1 and 2.2, we recommend to assess the strengths and weaknesses; opportunities and threats of the African system in comparison with the European one and, to some extent, with the Caribbean one. It's about assessing the applicability in the African context of other good regional practices.

Outcome: *Report on the comparative lessons that can be drawn from other regions and on their relevance to the case of Africa.*

To achieve result 3, the following activities are proposed:

3.1. A preliminary version of the strategic report should be prepared on the basis of the outcomes of the previous activities. The strategic report will build on the expected results 1 and 2 (Basically inventory and review) and will also give recommendations on the following points:

- a) Setting-up or strengthening African working groups with a view to promoting exchanges with already active international systems;
- b) Launching additional discussion and revision processes to address African specificities and identification of relevant supporting systems;
- c) Generating research activities in selected priority areas;
- d) Preparing a strategy on knowledge sharing on statistical paradigms for the region. Existing tools, such as Electronic Discussion Groups used by UNSD, IMF and OECD, will be analysed to propose a solution adapted to Africa.

3.3. The preliminary version of the strategic report will need to be submitted to the ASCC and later on to the StatCom-Africa for further guidance on the preparation of the final report.

Outcome: *The strategic report*

CONCLUSION

Leading such an exercise to a successful outcome will require a lot of consultation, coordination and exchanges at all the levels of the African statistical system (national, sub-regional and regional). But they will also be needed between this specific system and the other regional ones, on the one hand, and the existing discussion and revision processes, on the other hand. For this exercise, the African technical capacities will have to be mobilized wherever they are in order to make the identification of the needs and priorities as close as possible of the reality of the African context.

The work will have to be based on clear commitments from the main actors of the African statistical system on work programmes, calendars and expected outputs at each stage of the work. The effort is the one of the continent and all the forces involved in the development of statistics should be joined for the benefit of all.

Annex: Examples of discussion and revision processes

Discussion and revision processes

- **System of National Accounts (SNA)** – Inter Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (UNSD, IMF, World Bank, OECD, Eurostat, UN regional Commission). Target date 2008.

For the following specific topics:

- a) Pension: work coordinated by Eurostat and the European Central Bank
 - b) R&D: Deriving capital measures of Intellectual Property Products, coordinated by OECD in cooperation with Eurostat Task Force for coordination with the ESA95 revision process
 - c) Set of operational guidelines for the treatment of merchanting and goods for processing in NA, coordinated by UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group on Impact of Globalization on NA
 - d) Integrated measurement of informal sector within NA: a preliminary limited circulation draft chapter (SNA 93 rev.1 – Volume 2) discussed during Delhi group meeting on Informal Statistic sector
 - e) High level group (to be defined and set up by UNSC in 2009) to examine long term implication of rapid changes in the global economy, user 's needs and other factors on future methodological development of SNA
- **Revision of the fifth Edition of the IMF's Balance of Payment Manual** – IMF Committee on BOP (Some national NSI and banks (namely Uganda and South Africa), OECD, UNSD, UNCTAD, Eurostat + ISWGNA for coordination).

Supported by 4 technical expert group

- a) DITEG: Direct investment
- b) CUTEG: Monetary and economic union
- c) RESTEG: reserve assets
- d) BOPTTEG: all other areas of GOP and international investment position statistics

- **Third revision of recommendations for International Merchandise Trade Statistics:** TF IMTS supported by UNSD, work started in 2007, target date 2010
- **Revision of the Manual on Statistic of International Trade in Services (SITS)** (Interagency TF on SITS – Eurostat, UNWTO, UNSD-UNCTAD, WTO, IMF, OECD). To take into consideration
 - a) Revision of BPM 5 and SNA 93
 - b) Work of technical sub-group on Movement of natural person – Mode 4
- **Towards revision of International recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistic:** EG – DTS coordinated by UNSD (namely experts from Ghana and South Africa)
- **Revision of international recommendations for industrial statistics** (IRIS 2008)
- **International recommendations on tourism statistics:** UNEG on tourism statistics reviewed, amended and endorsed a provisional draft of international recommendations to be approved by the UNSC 2008
- **Tourism satellite account:** Interagency Coordination group: Eurostat, UNWTO, UNSD-UNCTAD, WTO, IMF and, OECD.
- **System of environment-economic accounting and System of environment-economic accounting for water (interim international statistical standard):** UNSD environment-economic account sections, London Group (sub-group on water accounting SEEAW interim international statistical standard) and the UN Committee of experts on environmental economic accounting. Mandate: Steer the process of revision of SEEA 2003 and elevate SEEA and SEEAW to international statistical standards
- **Energy accounts:** UNSD, London Group (sub-group on Mineral and energy accounts), 2 moderators (Statistic Denmark + Oslo Group)
- Etc...

Currently active City Groups

Name	Topic	African participation in the last 5 years
Canberra Group	Household statistics	-
Canberra I	Capital stock	South Africa
Canberra II	Measurement of non financial asset	-
Delhi Group	Informal sector	Ethiopia, Namibia, Nigeria, Zambia
London Group	Environment accounting	-
Ottawa Group	Price	-
Paris Group	Labour and compensation	South Africa
Rio Group	Poverty	UNECA
Roundtable	Business survey frame	-
Siena Group	Social statistics	-
Voorburg Group	Service statistics	-
Oslo Group	Energy statistics	South Africa
Washington Group	Disability statistics	Dem. Rep. Congo, Egypt, Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe