



ISI IFC High Level Meeting on Data Governance, Tunis, Tunisia, 22nd November 2019

Event concept note (*rev 9 September 2019*)

Background

Statistics can play a decisive role for measuring, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the key international initiatives supporting development – particularly the Agenda 2063 for the development of Africa and the United Nations 2030 international agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This was indeed a key message of the Directors-General (DGs) of the African National Statistical Offices (NSOs) meeting with the High Commissioner for Planning (HCP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA) on the occasion of the 2017 World Statistics Congress of the International Statistical Institute in Marrakesh. Considering that an endogenous statistical development model is a key element to support regional economic integration, UN ECA was invited to organise with interested stakeholders a Conference focussing on the development of statistics in Africa.

Needless to say, the development of capacity building in Africa should benefit from drawing on all international support available, including from the United Nation sphere but also from the central banking community as represented in the Irving Fisher Committee on Central Bank Statistics (IFC) of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), a Committee that is associated to the ISI. Moreover, existing resources constraints in official statistics call for joining forces between National Central Banks (NCBs) and NSOs – in particular, when addressing topics of common interest for African statisticians like data governance. The High Level meeting in Tunis will be a key opportunity to develop this cooperation.

Target audience and objectives of the event

This meeting will bring together two important data communities, with the target audience comprising the Director Generals of NSOs and Heads of Statistics in the NCBs in Africa as well as from the rest of the world and representatives of International Organisations (IOs). The main objective is to share innovative solutions in data collection (e.g. use of new data sources), discuss open issues in data management (e.g. data sharing), address data dissemination challenges (e.g. leaving no one behind) and raise the importance of data to support evidence-based economic policy. The proceedings will be published as a Report and both a press release and a policy statement will be produced on the occasion of the event.

Main topic: the importance of proper data governance frameworks

Both the 2030 UN Agenda for sustainable development and the global statistical response to the Great Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2007-09 in the context of the Data Gap Initiative endorsed by the G20 have underlined the role of economic statistics to support evidence based policy making. Renewed interest in the interaction between economic policy and data highlights the sheer importance of establishing proper governance frameworks when collecting, managing, disseminating and using official statistics. NSOs and NCBs' statistical departments as well as IOs are naturally actively involved in that area, in good coordination with academia and the public at large. The High Level meeting will revisit these various issues from several angles, with a focus on the African perspective.

As regards first **data collection**, "traditional" statistical surveys and censuses can increasingly be complemented with new information sources, especially big data and administrative records (the micro data revolution). This may prove a great opportunity for those less developed statistical systems in African states, not least considering the high costs associated with setting up standard data collections. Yet what are the key governance issues posed by these new data sources, in terms for instance of quality and accuracy, privacy, ownership, and reputation? Aspects of particular relevance for public statisticians are how the new information sources (being private commercial data sets or public registers that were not initially set up for a statistical purpose) and the data producers outside of the National Statistical System feature vis-à-vis the Fundamental Principles that have been defined for the perimeter of Official Statistics. This also raises the question of whether and how national statistical legislation and quality frameworks should be revised accordingly.

Turning to the second area, **data management**, the combination of new data types and evolving analytical needs requires more, and sometimes different types of resources, and this may prove challenging in developing countries. A key area of focus in Africa is how to build statistical capacity, and what role national statistical bodies could play in this endeavour together with IOs.

Third, **disseminating data** is also posing new challenges. On the one hand, new digitalisation techniques allow for an easier, almost cost-free access to information, which can be a great opportunity for African populations. On the other hand, the increasing complexity of economic and financial activities puts a premium on statistical education and financial literacy. Indeed, there has been an increasing focus on financial inclusion policies in Africa (e.g. leaving no one behind). But actions to facilitate households' and small firms' access to credit and payment services can only be effective if economic agents have a good understanding of financial issues and data. Another complexity relates to the growing need to capture the implications of globalisation for official statistics.

Lastly, there has been a growing interest globally for better **using data for policy** purposes, especially when designing, calibrating, assessing and modifying policy actions. A key factor is that the granularity of new data sets can help to capture very distinct, specific dimensions that are relevant for policy actions – in turn helping to facilitate ex-ante impact assessment, understand feedback effects and unintended consequences, and identify areas of improvement. How should such indicator-based frameworks be developed in Africa to draw the lessons of policy actions? What are the implications for official statistics, considering in particular existing limitations to data access and data sharing?