

ISI – IFC High Level Meeting on Data Governance

To be organised in Tunis on 22 November 2019

Event concept note

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Background

During the last ISI WSC in Marrakech a meeting of the Directors-General (DGs) of the African National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) was organised jointly by the High Commissioner for Planning (HCP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA) on 20 July 2017. This meeting concluded with the adoption of a declaration, which emphasised the decisive role statistics can play in measuring, monitoring and evaluating the objectives of the implementation of the Agenda 2063 for the development of Africa, the 2030 international agenda for the SDGs, as well as other initiatives. It was felt that an endogenous statistical development model could usefully support regional economic integration from this perspective. UN ECA was invited to consider the organisation, in cooperation with a local partner, the Conference of DGs of the NSIs of Africa in 2019 with all partner institutions involved in 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 NCBs and NSOs – in particular, when addressing topics of common interest for African statisticians like data governance aspects.

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*. National statistical offices and central banking statistical departments as well as international organisations are naturally actively involved in that area, in good coordination with academia and the public at large. The workshop 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? Issues 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 international organisations.

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, 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 an increasing 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?