Modern
Technology
to enhance
National
Statistical Systems

Cloud

You Tube

g+

United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

African Statistics Day

18 November **2015**

Better data for better lives:
Harnessing modern technology
to enhance national statistical systems

%

MEDIA
ADVISORY

November 18 is African Statistics Day. It is celebrated every year to increase public awareness of the important role that statistics play in all aspects of social and economic life in Africa and in preserving the environment in which people live. The theme for this year's event is "Better data for better lives: Harnessing modern technology to enhance national statistical systems" and is aligned with the theme of World Statistics Day, which will be held on 20 October 2015. This year's African Statistics Day focuses on data quality and enhancing the capacity-building of national statistical systems in Africa.

High-quality data for better lives

Policymakers rely on high-quality data for the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of policies in order to raise the living standards of peoples. National statistical systems are playing a critical role in generating statistics needed for decision-making. New technologies and strengthened national statistical systems enable the development of informed policies and allow decision makers to take better, evidence-based decisions that positively impact people's welfare and eventually result in better lives. In developing countries, the invaluable role of modern technology in supporting national statistical systems is evident, as documented in most of the pilot studies carried out, both in terms of more effective and efficient practices in statistical data production and in terms of disseminating statistical products.

Bridging the global digital divide to help Africa to meet the proposed sustainable development goals

Given that information and communications technology (ICT) is evolving remarkably quickly in Africa, sometimes even on a daily basis, the digital divide – a concept which describes the technological gap between developing and developed countries – is gradually decreasing. However, the developing world in general is still lags behind in ICT adoption. According to the 2014 ICT Development Index published by the International Telecommunication Union, the top 30 countries in the rankings are mostly high-income countries. It is imperative, therefore, for African countries to adopt widely and harness modern technology to accelerate the bridging of both the global digital divide and at the same time the digital divide that exists between urban and rural areas in the African region, to ensure that the proposed sustainable development goals are met.

Modern technology to improve data collection, processing, analysis and dissemination

Most African statistical systems rely primarily on manual collection of data using paper-based survey forms. However, this traditional method of data collection is costly, time-consuming, and prone to errors. The timely deliverance of high-quality data is one of the major challenges facing statistical development in Africa. The usage of mobile devices and the Internet is beginning to replace traditional methods of data collection and dissemination, and national statistical systems should take advantage of modern technology to improve production and dissemination of timely and high-quality data.

Geospatial technology is an efficient and effective tool for conducting censuses and surveys, because it has desirable features with regard to data collection, storing, processing, timeliness, coverage and dissemination. In Africa usage of geospatial technology has increased significantly. Owing to the geographic nature of most census data, satellite imagery and maps are enhancing the methodology for conducting censuses and surveys in data collection and data dissemination. For instance, maps enhance data collection by capturing and visualizing the locations. Geospatial technology also plays a critical role in the collection of different thematic data, such as agricultural, demographic, forestry, urban and rural planning statistics.

Enhancing national statistical systems through modern technology to ensure better data

Developing and maintaining appropriate human and ICT infrastructure assets will certainly enhance national statistical systems in Africa. In this respect, national, regional and international investment will certainly accelerate the overall development process in Africa. While there is still some way to go before Africa as a whole can produce useful statistics that are relevant, of high quality and consistent across the continent and across time, this goal is well on its way to being achieved thanks to the considerable efforts that continue to be made in terms of strengthening both statistical production capacity and the dissemination infrastructure of statistical institutions. In addition, it is vital to continue to promote the role of national statistical offices in national planning, including their basic function as national statistical coordinating institutions.

For media inquiries, please contact: