

High Level Political Forum
Panel discussion on: National mechanisms for monitoring progress and reporting on implementation on implementation for the achievement of SDG

Statistics coming of age
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Statistics a conduit of trust. It is the basis for political transactions and diplomacy. It provides a crucial corner stone for détente and multilateralism. It is the currency that facilitates communication, knowledge and understanding amongst nations, amongst peoples, and within communities. Statistics has become one of the most transacted knowledge products. However, for it to be a conduit of trust, its governance structures and conventions should be impeccable. It comes as no surprise that one of the first Commissions of the United Nations after it was established was the Statistics Commission, which is now sixty nine years old. Established in 1947, the United Nations Statistics Commission is to provide a trusted socio-economic picture of the state planet earth. This mission and mandate has not changed but only over time has evolved and taken on matters such as environment.

As the responsibilities evolved and the bi-polar world changed, it was clear that the Statistics Commission had to generate a crucial set of standards that would facilitate how global statistics systems are governed, how adaptation to technology is embraced and how countries that emerge into amongst others, democracies, including the proliferation of market economy orientate themselves into new statistical frameworks. These set of standards came to be known as the UN Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics. Inaugurated in 1994 at the Statistics Commission, twenty years later in 2014 these principles were adopted by the UN General Assembly.

What happened throughout this history was not an accident, but evolved and emerged as a consequence of an uncontested realisation that a statistics community of practice delivering statistics of high quality is an inalienable asset for stable, prosperous and efficient communities, nations and the world. World peace can be enhanced through high quality evidence for policy making. The MDG era pointed to this requirement and set the stage for the SDGs. An important assertion of the SDGs is leave no one behind. Only when we have high quality statistics can we disaggregate and know that no one is left behind.

To be a conduit of trust statistics depend on practices and frameworks. In this regard statistics depend on a professional code of practice and legislative mandates as espoused in the UN Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics and Practice. These principles recognize the inalienable entitlement of citizens to high quality information so that individuals, communities and nations and indeed the globe can make informed choices about their futures. In this regard official statistics shall be produced without fear, favour or prejudice to meet these requirements.

The statistics community was thus called upon to provide what they do best to the world of sustainable development goals. The community has delivered a report on indicators that should monitor Sustainable Development Goals. They have carefully pointed out which

indicators will deliver measurement based on adequacy of data sources and resources and which may take a little longer to deliver. These are now available for consideration.

More importantly the world of disaggregation suggests that location counts. Numbers without geographic specificity conceal crucial detail as regards human activity in time and space. Human geography is crucial to understanding development. Statisticians have thus considered and embraced geography as a critical element that addresses the SDGs and human endeavour.

In South Africa, statistical legislative reform focuses on data revolution, statistical geography, nationwide statistics cadre, and statistical coordination. In particular functional institutional relationships can enhance coordination. In this regard the landmark Constitutional Court judgement of June this year regarding elections has put South Africa on the path of creating disaggregated data. In this judgement, the South African state is compelled to provide physical addresses to all its citizens in order for them to exercise their choices. The impact of this judgement is that in eighteen months, South Africa will have implemented a system of addresses that enjoins citizen activity in space and time. As regards the SDGs, South Africa through its National Development Programme has focused on domesticating the SDGs and in this regard Statistics South Africa, the national fact finder, has worked on indicators of the SDGs and mapped them on the NDP as well as focusing on Agenda 2063. Regionally African statisticians have not only taken to heart the SDGs but have costed the indicator framework of both the SDGs and Agenda 2063. Furthermore African Statisticians have just concluded a technology and financing strategy documents.

Crowd sourcing is facilitated by availability of personal technology and importantly mobile devices. Important information is passively collected through these devices that can be transformed into statistics for improving informational platforms of nations. Crowd sourced data to be useful and graduate into museum value of statistics has to possess time series capability. This implies that crowd sourced data has to be streamlined and processed so that for generations to come, the changes observed will be one related to the phenomena being observed and not so one of changes in instruments of observation.

Moving ahead South Arica has been honoured by the United Nations to host the first United Nations World Data Forum in Cape Town from the 16-20 January 2017. At this World Data Forum, technology, statistics, politics, society and economy will interact with a purpose to shape the world futures and answer the question on how the SDGs will or are being met.

Statistics as a conduit of trust has certainly come of age. See you in South Africa at the first United Nations World Data Forum in January 2017.