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Items for information: statistical capacity-building

Report of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request made by the Statistical Commission at its forty-third session (see E/2012/24, chap. I, sect. B), the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century on statistical capacity-building, which is presented to the Commission for information. The report outlines the Partnership's efforts to promote the use of better statistics and the development of statistical capacities as a central part of the enabling environment for development. The report also highlights progress made in implementing the Busan Action Plan for Statistics and reflects on emerging topics likely to affect national statistical systems, such as the big data and open data agendas. The Commission is requested to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2013/1.



Report of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century on statistical capacity-building

I. Introduction

1. The Partnership for Statistics in Development in the Twenty-first Century promotes the use of better statistics and the development of statistical capacities as a central part of the enabling environment for development. The Partnership secretariat undertakes a wide range of activities on the Partnership's behalf, including the promotion of and the recent agreement on a global action plan that will help drive statistical development over the coming years. The present report highlights progress made in implementing that global action plan and the secretariat's involvement in carrying out some of those activities.

II. Progress made in implementing the Busan Action Plan for Statistics

2. In collaboration with the World Bank and other partners, the Partnership proposed a Busan Action Plan for Statistics¹ at the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, late in 2011. The Plan has three principal objectives: (a) fully integrating statistics into decision-making; (b) promoting open access to statistics; and (c) increasing resources for statistical systems. Those objectives are supported by five actions, which are discussed below. At its forty-third session, the Statistical Commission fully endorsed the objectives of the Plan and the five steps needed to strengthen national statistical systems in developing countries, and urged the global community to provide sustained support for the full implementation of the Plan through the adoption of a coordinated and consultative approach.²

3. At the March 2012 session of its annual meetings, the Partnership Board mandated the Partnership secretariat to act also as the secretariat for the implementation of the Busan Action Plan. The Board established an inter-agency task team to propose a prioritized implementation plan including sequenced activities and a logical framework to monitor progress. The task team has met several times in 2012 to review the implementation priorities identified by partners, conduct a gap analysis mapping those priorities against the actions set out in the Plan, and identify a number of other issues that could be explored further. At the 2013 session of the Board, the task team will present a detailed proposal for implementing and monitoring the Action Plan.

4. The following subsections present progress already under way in implementing activities under the five actions.

Action 1: strengthen statistical strategies

5. The first action set out in the Plan calls upon the international community to strengthen and refocus national and regional statistical strategies, with particular

¹ See E/CN.3/2012/16.

² E/CN.3/2012/34, chap. I, sect. B, decision 43/113.

emphasis on improving statistical systems that address country-level development priorities. The Partnership has a long track record in this area, as the main focus of its work over the past eight years has been on supporting developing countries in the design, implementation and monitoring of national strategies for the development of statistics.³

6. Throughout 2012, the Partnership has updated the guidelines on designing and implementing national strategies for the development of statistics and integrated a study on costing strategies. The new version, which includes the latest best practices and lessons learned along with country case studies illustrating key issues, will be unveiled in 2013, most likely in the first quarter.

7. In October 2012, the Partnership produced a report on progress made in designing and implementing national strategies for the development of statistics in International Development Association borrower countries, lower-middle-income countries and all African countries.⁴ The report reveals that, of the 118 countries covered by the report, 96 (81 per cent) are engaged in a process relating to national strategies for the development of statistics while 16 (14 per cent) are currently without a strategy but are planning one. Only 6 (5 per cent) are without a strategy and are not currently planning one.

8. In recent years, the Partnership has also begun to assist regions in designing regional strategies for the development of statistics. In 2012, the secretariat co-organized, with Eurostat and regional partners, two workshops on such strategies: one for Central America and one for South-East Asia.

9. Other partners have been very active in undertaking activities that support action 1. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and its partners have begun the implementation of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics. The Health Metrics Network has partnered with many regional and international partners to agree on regional plans to improve civil registration and vital statistics. The Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) Initiative is aimed at accelerating efforts to generate comparable gender equality indicators in health, education, employment, entrepreneurship and assets. A platform is currently being established for the compilation of data, and pilot countries for data collection are being identified. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development will contribute to data compilation with regard to indicators on gender equality in the sectors of education, employment and entrepreneurship. The World Bank is scaling up its support for the improvement of household surveys so that the information collected can inform a host of policy issues (e.g., poverty, gender, food fortification and national accounts) while minimizing the response burden. The Bank is increasing its attention in order to improve gender statistics, in particular to make progress in data availability in two areas (women's economic opportunities and women's voice and agency), for at least 10 countries over the coming year. The Bank is also scaling up its regional programming in order to improve statistics in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States through a strategic partnership with the Russian Federation. The Bank remains active in improving agricultural statistics in close collaboration with the implementation of the Global Strategy. All of these regional and international

³ See E/CN.3/2005/18.

⁴ Available at <http://www.paris21.org/nsds-status>.

initiatives promote the integration of their sectoral/cross-cutting statistics into national strategies for the development of statistics.

Action 2: promote open data

10. The second action set out in the Plan calls upon the international community to implement standards for data preservation, documentation and dissemination that permit full public access to statistics. Demand for support is rapidly on the rise, as nearly 60 countries (including some 30 developing countries) have signed on to the Open Government Partnership, and open data portals are springing up around the developing world, notably in Kenya and Moldova.

11. The Partnership secretariat continues to co-manage and implement, with the World Bank and other partners, two key statistical programmes that provide key inputs into the open data agenda: the International Household Survey Network and the Accelerated Data Programme.⁵ The Network and the Programme have been very successful in improving data archiving/dissemination and harmonizing survey programmes. In 2012, the Programme provided technical and financial support to 65 countries in the areas of microdata documentation, archiving and dissemination. Sustainable capacity has been built in several countries that have considerably improved their microdata management practices and client orientation. Afristat, the African Development Bank and the secretariat of the Pacific Community are contributing to the implementation of the Programme in several countries.

12. The World Bank has taken a strong lead in promoting open data. In addition to organizing the 2012 International Open Government Data Conference, held in July 2012, the Bank has developed an “open data readiness assessment tool” that will help guide actions to improve country capacity to participate in open data agendas. This tool will be piloted in three to five countries during the coming year. The Bank’s Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building has also been repurposed to fund open data activities. In addition, the Bank is engaged in improving the “demand side” of open data while working in collaboration with other regional and global institutions with similar mandates, such as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the Overseas Development Institute, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the Open Government Partnership, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the World Wide Web Foundation. Through its contribution to the International Household Survey Network and the Accelerated Data Programme, the Bank is developing tools to facilitate household microdata anonymization for developing country partners, a key “next step” in improving public access and the usability of microlevel information.

Action 3: increase skills to use statistics

13. The third action set out in the Plan is to develop programmes to increase the knowledge and skills needed to use statistics effectively for planning, analysis, monitoring and evaluation, thus increasing transparency and accountability.

14. The Partnership’s role in supporting the third action involves the production of advocacy materials and the organization of user-producer consultations. Several such consultations, targeting agreements on national data needs for policy and improvements in the use of innovative data collection techniques, were held in

⁵ See E/CN.3/2007/25.

2012, including a regional event for countries of Francophone Africa and a national event for the Philippines. The Francophone Africa seminar⁶ gathered more than 50 high-level representatives from 18 countries as well as regional and international institutions, and was opened by the Minister of Planning and Development of Côte d'Ivoire. It concluded with a list of recommendations (integration of national strategies for the development of statistics into poverty reduction strategies, political and financial support for statistics, strengthening legal frameworks and relations with users, and involvement of statisticians in discussions on a post-2015 development framework) and a concrete action plan to be implemented in countries with the support of the Partnership and its regional partners (e.g., organizing an annual user-producer dialogue workshop, producing an advocacy booklet on the post-2015 development process, and establishing sustainable coordination mechanisms between national statistical offices and poverty reduction strategy units at the country level).

Action 4: track outcomes of global summits

15. The fourth action set out in the Plan is to build and maintain results monitoring instruments to track outcomes of all global summits and high-level forums.

16. Little has been undertaken thus far in support of the fourth action; however, some new activities have already been identified. These include: bringing statisticians from developing countries into deliberations on the post-2015 development framework, developing an online inventory of global summits and descriptions of their indicators, and conducting an analysis of the implications of donor data requirements for national statistical system work programmes in selected countries.

Action 5: ensure that financing is robust

17. The last action set out in the Plan is to ensure that financing for statistical information is robust and that funding instruments and approaches reflect the new modalities and actors in development finance. This action underpins the other four.

18. Since 2008, the Partnership has conducted an annual exercise, the Partner Report on Support to Statistics (PRESS), that will be instrumental in informing activities under this action. PRESS gathers information from providers of development cooperation on their support for statistical development worldwide.

19. From the 2012 PRESS round,⁷ covering active support over the period 2010-2012, several salient points emerged: (a) global estimated commitments have risen considerably over the past five rounds; (b) support for statistics continues to be highly concentrated on a small number of "aid darlings"; (c) a large share of global support for statistics continues to come from a very small number of providers; and (d) commitments are considerably fragmented, with many recipient countries receiving too little aid from too many donors.

⁶ See <http://paris21.org/abidjan-sept2012>.

⁷ See <http://www.paris21.org/PRESS2012/>.

III. Emerging topics and future directions of the Partnership's work

20. Once implementation arrangements for the Busan Action Plan for Statistics are endorsed, the Partnership secretariat will adapt itself to assume the mandate of the secretariat for the Action Plan. This will involve, inter alia, ensuring linkages with the other building blocks agreed upon at Busan (e.g., results/accountability, effective institutions and the EDGE Initiative) and monitoring progress made on Plan implementation.

21. The Partnership is also currently exploring emerging topics likely to have a significant impact on national statistical systems and implications for the Busan Action Plan. Subject to Partnership Board endorsement, new topics could include:

(a) The agendas of open data and big data and the promise of new data collection technologies are gaining prominence globally. There are potential positive and negative consequences for national statistical systems as a result of both of these developments. The Partnership intends to convene user-producer consultations with relevant stakeholders to discuss how to best address these agendas and ensure that users obtain the data that they need without undermining the role of official statisticians;

(b) Discussions on the next phase of the Millennium Development Goals have heated up in recent years, and the Partnership will be active in lobbying for the integration of statistical capacity development into the deliberations. Although the post-2015 development framework is still being negotiated, it is likely to address emerging issues (e.g., climate change, social cohesion and well-being) that will place a burden on the statistical systems of developing countries to measure progress. The Partnership proposes to bring statisticians from developing countries to the negotiating table to ensure that their voice is heard;

(c) The Partnership proposes to assist national statistics offices in improving their communication/advocacy skills in the light of new advancements in data collection, processing and dissemination. This work would also address needs for relevant technical training.
