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Protocol

It is a great honor and privilege to attend this unique event, a workshop to deliberate on new ways to improve the collection, processing, dissemination and curation of microdata sets by African national statistical offices (NSOs). I congratulate the organizers of this event for the diligence, perseverance, courage and foresight in embarking on a challenging but much-needed exercise. It is certainly heart-warming to observe, yet again, the increasing interest in the primary responsibility of our statistical offices. I believe this is a positive trend that not only helps academics and researchers, but provides feedback to NSOs themselves to be able to improve their processes, while helping policymakers obtain a clearer picture of the consequences of policymaking in our various jurisdictions.

Introduction

As the world approaches the end of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and prepares for a Post-2015 Development Framework, the importance of timely and reliable official statistics cannot be over emphasized. One does not need to look too far to grasp the importance of ensuring that reliable and dependable data is made available across Africa in addressing national issues. Statistics are a vital source of evidence as they provide us with clear, objective, numerical data on all aspects of our lives and the state of our country, including the growth and characteristics of our population, economic performance, levels of health and wellbeing and the condition of our surrounding environment. Without these, we cannot make well-informed decisions that will catalyse our social and economic development and transform the future. Accordingly, the significance of statistical information for making evidenced-based decisions that guide the implementation of new policy, monitoring of existing policy and evaluation of the effectiveness of policy decisions cannot be overemphasised. This point is especially relevant to African countries. When we are able to collate, understand and interpret data correctly, as well as develop our ability to identify key areas in our society or our economy that require change, our policy prescriptions and direction are more likely to respond to the real needs of the community.

Growing Demand For Statistics: What Is Responsible?

The timing of this meeting is therefore auspicious as it coincides with a period of increasing focus on and demand for data and statistical information in Africa. There is undeniably an

increasing recognition of the importance of statistics leading to an emerging resurgence in the demand for data and statistical information in Africa. A cursory look at some key data request indicators at the Nigerian NBS can attest to this: in 2005, just under 50,000 reports were downloaded from the NBS website, compared to over 2 million in 2014, and this does not include requests for data by walk-in users, which was 23 in 2005, compared to 817 in 2014. Last year NBS had the highest freedom of information requests of all government agencies in the country. Furthermore, in 2005, visits to our website was recorded at 36, 280 but at end of 2014, this was nearly 7.5million hits! And the number of times NBS was mentioned in the media in 2005 was about 73 times, whereas in 2015 we counted 6,365. The sheer numbers of invitations I have had to honor from international investors, from multilateral organizations and from the media is mind boggling and they are coming in from all over the world.

So with this obvious increased interest in African data, one might ask the following questions: where are the numbers?: Are they poor? : is there a statistical tragedy in Africa or is it a statistical re-awakening and resurgence? Let me attempt to answer some of these questions by first explaining what's driving this enhanced focus and demand for data in Africa by using Nigeria as a case study. I classify these factors driving the demand for data in Nigeria into two: exogenous factors and endogenous factors. The exogenous factors which are arguably more dominant typically involve "external demand" as dictated by conditions occurring outside the country. As a result of declining growth and business opportunities in most parts of the developed world, several international investors are seeking investment havens elsewhere for opportunities and attention is turning to emerging markets in Africa in general. After the onset of the 2008 global financial crisis, growth slowed to an average of less than 2 percent in the developed world, while many African countries recorded over 5% growth rates. In fact the African rising story really started after this period. The result was a huge inflow of interest and capital inflow into the region. In fact, today about 60-percent of the NSE is foreign owned, from less than 5 percent in 2000. At the same time a huge number of international brands have come in and are now doing business in Nigeria and many African countries as have international development agencies. Foreign investors and development agencies, however, require huge amount of data to make their decisions and with this increase in interest African statistical offices are being put under pressure to meet the demand and accordingly are being forced to raise the bar higher in the quality of data produced.

On the domestic front, data demand is being fuelled by what I call "endogenous" factors, one can point to the increased demand for data due to the increased insistence for accountability and

good governance by citizens, as well as the willingness by governments at all levels to demonstrate progress and democratic dividends in various sectors. Nigeria just completed successful elections recently and huge parts of the campaign were arguments about data. So the incumbent combs through all our data to look for all the indicators that look good so as to argue it is doing well and the opposition looks for all poor indicators and uses that to suggest the current government isn't performing. The strange part is the incumbent will praise the quality of the data that shows it is performance and insist it was produced with the highest quality and at the same time insist all the indicators that suggest it isn't performing well had computation errors and wasn't credible though produced by the same agency and people. The opposition will do the exact opposite and insist all the data we produced that is positive is forged but the ones we produce that makes the government look bad is correct.

Endogenous demand for data is also being driven by many African countries returning to strategic planning and renewed emphasis on key performance indicators for outputs and outcomes rather than solely on inputs.

The combination of these exogenous and endogenous factors has thus created a scenario where there is immense attention and interest in Nigeria, and Africa in general, as the next major destination for growth and opportunities, and with it has come increased demand for information and consequently significant efforts over the last decade by statistical offices in African countries to improve the quality, timeliness and reliability of statistics. In Africa, we are encouraged that statistics is meant to be demand determined. But the demand in many African countries and definitely in Nigeria is determined and driven largely as I mentioned earlier by the needs of foreign investors and development agencies and to a lesser extent by needs of the prevailing government. Data needs by research institutions are weak due to limited appreciation and conduct of research. At the same time the important data needed by the public to hold governments accountable though existing are also not considered priority. Statistics budgets in many African countries like Nigeria are funded principally by development agencies and to lesser extent by governments. This means the data that will be produced will concentrate on the needs of these development agencies and to a lesser degree on the priorities, policies and programs needed for development by the prevailing government. Accordingly, African statistics are not poor in my opinion as the quality of published data across the continent has improved considerably in the last decade. No, we are not misled by African statistics because the methodology and processes used for computation is and has always been known and published. If my base year for computing GDP is 1990 and outdated, you cannot claim you were misled

since you were always aware of the base year being used in the methodology section of the report but choose to use the data anyway. While I might agree there is a statistical tragedy it isn't so much as a result of the quality of data produced which has tremendously improved but as a result of the lack of enough data published to meet a varied degree of different data needs. I believe the problem mostly lies in the determination of data demand by largely external needs and whatever current governments are willing to fund which are sometimes mostly data that makes the prevailing government look good. Other data that are needed by other interests are either not done, or is done with limited quantity and quality as they are deemphasized in favor of what development agencies and the government want which on the other hand are produced by African statistics office with increasing quality.

Moving ahead and stepping up the Game

Without a doubt, the attention being accorded Africa's development statistics by citizens, governments and foreign interests will continue to soar, even as doubts remain about the global pace of economic recovery amid weak oil prices. African economies have proven to be much more resilient and there is stronger optimism about growth prospects relative to other regions of the world. However, to translate this optimism to reality for the 46.8% poor on the continent (WDI, 2011), the 7.6% facing unemployment (ILO, 2012), and the 460/100,000 women likely to die during childbirth (WHO, 2013), policymakers in African countries must not only be aware of the current situation, but also be able to situate the present circumstances within a historical context of their policies, in order to assure the future we want¹. The role of the African national statistics offices, and the data they produce, has therefore become increasingly critical to identifying the issues, influencing the dialogue and informing the policies. *How long* we (as NSOs) remain relevant will therefore be determined by *how much* demand citizens and policymakers place on our data. This is why continuous efforts, such as this brainstorming workshop, are necessary to evaluate the existing systems and identify opportunities for improvement. I believe this initiative to improve data curation will go a long way in helping to sustain the data revolution and statistical renaissance we are currently witnessing across the continent.

¹ Data sources: WDI – World Bank *World Development Indicators*; ILO- International Labour Organisation *Global Employment Trends, 2013*; WHO- World Health Organisation *Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990 to 2013*

At the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria, we regard data dissemination as an important priority, just as the more elaborate data collection and production activities. This is because of our conviction that data collected but not disseminated or used to inform policy is as good as not being collected at all. The challenge of declining funds also forced us to be more creative in exploring opportunities to increase our client-user base. To a large extent, and with all sense of modesty, I would say we have been very successful in this regard. Not only has the demand for Nigerian data skyrocketed since 2011 as I mentioned earlier, we have also been able to significantly improve the quality and reliability of our.

Here I will like to highlight two relevant success factors. First is the importance of *collaboration*. Too often, NSOs are tempted to yield to the desire to shield their work from the prying eyes of the public, or other interested parties. But this has often led to more – not less- suspicion about the data output. For Nigeria's GDP rebasing exercise for example, an elaborate plan of collaboration was launched involving multiple stakeholders in government, private enterprise, development partners, academia, and even representatives of political interest groups. I am proud to say that we also received assistance from Ghana as one of the statisticians from the Ghanaian Statistics office was one of the consultants that worked with us on the project. At this juncture I will like to extend my appreciation and that of the Nigerian NBS to the Ghanaian Statistical office for their assistance. The culminating effect of this wide collaboration was that at the end of the exercise, even though the results still faced push-backs from skeptics, the 'most dangerous skeptics' and other key stakeholders who had been part of the process all along supported the outcome. The same strategy was adopted in September 2014 when the NBS modified its unemployment threshold. I strongly believe that NSOs have more to gain through such strategic collaboration with important stakeholders. Even today we openly invite members of the public and civil society organizations to observe and monitor our data collection exercises. We believe the best way to deal with sceptics is to be open and transparent to all and on all.

The second success factor was the role of the *academia*. During both projects, NBS relied on the expertise of renowned academics who shared their feedback on the figures, and in the case of the labour force statistics, an academic chaired the review committee of 30 different stakeholders. This was another unprecedented move that allowed the Bureau to benefit from the perspectives of 'outsiders', as well as gain popular and intellectual support for the eventual outcome of the review. I am of the opinion that a strong working relationship among African NSOs on the one hand and NSOs and the academia in their countries and other stakeholders on the other hand in

our respective jurisdictions is critical to improving both the quality of the data products, and receiving the necessary feedback from a critical member of the user community.

Since 2011, NBS data dissemination model has shifted from its emphasis on paper reports to heavy reliance on online media. The Bureau uses its website and data portal to disseminate its statistical reports, which has averaged 40 each year since 2011. In addition, the microdata set is archived in the National Data Archive (NADA), and most indicators can be retrieved from the NBS data portal in a user-friendly format. We also have an on-going relationship with the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) which hosts some of our datasets. And to reach the more tech-savvy, curious Nigerian with ever-increasing demands on public authorities, we have relied on social media tools including YouTube, Facebook and Twitter to aggressively promote the knowledge, use and understanding of key statistics. In addition, individual business organizations have approached the Bureau to collaborate on broadening the scope of our datasets, possible use of “big data”, testing new field equipment, all of which are under consideration as future projects. On the continental level, Nigeria is also one of the countries participating in the AfDB’s African Information Highway (AIH) initiative.

Certainly, challenges remain especially with respect to sustainable funding, coordination with sub-national statistical units, emergence of new players (eg. private opinion pollsters) and the integration of big data amongst others. In addition, efforts to ensure privacy of respondents, prevent ‘respondent fatigue’, and improve coordination with development partners’ interests are also important issues that require careful consideration. The National Bureau of Statistics strongly supports and promotes opportunities to foster collaboration between NSOs and the academic community, especially where the improvement of data quality is involved. We are pleased to associate with this workshop in the hope that our discussions will further highlight some of these issues, and provide the necessary guidance and assistance to our NSOs as they strive to improve on the delivery of their mandate.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by saying that as Africa positions itself along with the rest of the world for the Post-2015 Development Framework it is clear that the role of credible data and official statistics would be paramount. National Statistical Offices across Africa would have to ensure that they adopt the most efficient and effective strategies to improve their statistical capacities to meet the growing demands of governance and development. Despite the numerous challenges faced by NSOs in Africa, I wish to use this medium to encourage everyone to support improvements in

African statistics and not to falsely and probably unfairly pull them down. The possibilities ahead of us far outweigh the challenges before us and as they say Rome wasn't built in a day. Thank you for your patience and for your kind attention.