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**Africa Statistics Day Workshop**  
**Data for development - Opportunities and Challenges**  
Intercontinental Mauritius Resort Balaclava fort, 16 Nov 2018

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**Official Opening Speech**

**by Mr Patrick YIP WANG WING, Chairperson Statistics Board**

Director, Statistics Mauritius

Colleagues from the Statistics Board and Statistics Mauritius

Distinguished guests

Dear participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good morning to all of you.

It has now become a tradition for Statistics Mauritius to organise in the context of the African Statistics Day a workshop. This provides a rare opportunity for members of the profession not only to interact and exchange views on a statistics-related theme but also to raise public awareness about the important role **Official Statistics (c.a.d. les *Statistiques Publiques*)** can and does play in all aspects of social and economic development.

As it is well known, already the statistical information published by Statistics Mauritius and other producers of official statistics (namely the Bank of Mauritius and the Ministry of Health) covers an impressive variety of topics. They can range from the National Accounts to the Health Accounts, from external balance of payments to quality of life, from crime and

security to social safety net; all of which are publicly available and easily accessible on their websites. No doubt, this is a remarkable achievement to the credit of those institutions and their staff as well as to the data providers and other partners in what we call the **National Statistical System (the NSS)**.

However, it is evident that as our economy and society are being transformed, user needs and requirements are becoming more complex and demanding. To meaningfully meet this challenge, we, the statistical authorities - Statistics Mauritius and the Statistics Board - have initiated during the year a structured review and assessment process of the existing framework and arrangements that have been serving us well so far, and a consideration of proposals that may be warranted to enable us to continue fulfil our mission, statutory obligations and Customer Charter commitments in an efficient manner. The outcome of such rethinking will be embodied in a new **National Strategy for Official Statistics (NSOS 2019-23)**.

I need here to stress that this 5-year Strategy is not meant just for Statistics Mauritius and other producers of official statistics. It will be of direct relevance to all those who hold administrative data and provide them for generating official statistics as well as other key partners of the National Statistical System (NSS), including Rodrigues. That is why, from the start, a participatory approach has been taken and emphasis placed on buy-in and ownership by the various public institutions. Thanks largely to the cooperation of sector ministries, work on the NSOS has been progressing at a fair pace, as Professor Ben Kiregyera will show you shortly.

Design of NSOS 2019-23 is also benefitting from a **Peer Review of our National Statistical System** that was carried out six months ago by high-level statisticians from South Africa, Morocco and Iceland, under the aegis of the African Union Commission and the Partnership in Statistics Development in the 21st Century (in short PARIS 21). This review concluded that - I quote: *“Mauritius has a relatively well developed and operating system for official statistics; ... and production and dissemination of Official Statistics is largely in compliance with the UN Fundamental*

*Principles of Official Statistics and the African Charter on Statistics.*” As you may be aware, both documents lay down the internationally accepted principles and standards for upholding professional independence, integrity, impartiality, confidentiality and other best practices for official statistical Information to be of high-quality and play fully its role.

While highlighting many strengths and positive elements, the reviewers also did bring to light some weaknesses and challenges. I would like here to highlight those of direct relevance to today’s discussion, namely: -

- ✧ Need for institutional review of ICT arrangements;
- ✧ Need for secure ICT and data storage system and for standard-based and automated data exchange relying on secure data transfer protocols;
- ✧ Need for strengthening cooperation and coordination within the NSS; and
- ✧ Need for a framework for systematic quality management of processes and outputs for official Statistics.

This is the context in which today’s workshop on the theme of **DATA for Development** is being held. And I wish here to express my appreciation to Mr Hawabhay and the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology for discussing with us how recent initiatives taken in this field are opening up new avenues for statistical development, and also what should be the accompanying measures and safeguards.

Dear participants

It has been said that *“Data is the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s new raw material”*<sup>1</sup>. And rightly so.

It has also been reported that, driven by advancements in connectivity, the volume of world data is doubling every two years.

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<sup>1</sup> *“Open Data White Paper: Unleashing the Potential” Foreword by the Rt Hon Francis Maude, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, June 2012, UK*

And for the first time, technology exists - with powerful tools for mining, managing and analysing big data - for unlocking the potential and the value data hold.

In the field of Official Statistics, we know the ambition set for the next 5 years: to build a solid framework and strong capacity for statistical production and dissemination, in terms of relevance, scope, quality, timeliness and data disaggregation.

Therefore, for statisticians, those unprecedented technological developments offer unique opportunities to optimise on the digital materials available from diverse sources and enhance quality and robustness of their outputs. This should be translated into better public policies and improved service delivery, provided of course that statistical information is mainstreamed into the decision-making process.

Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that for any public administration and its management, the task of implementation ahead will be very challenging - and can even be overwhelming. Doing so will require taking innovative approaches, acquiring new skills, adjusting internal organisational set-up and changing administrative rules and operational guidelines. One key challenge will be to put into place the required process and procedures to ensure that anonymised data remain anonymised and personal data remain personal. I trust this would also trigger in public institutions a review of their records management, storage and security practices.

In this respect, effectiveness considerations may well require a more forceful and a whole-of-Government implementation approach instead of a stand-alone or bilateral department-by-department one, too heavily dependent on an individual's risk-aversion and status quo bias profile.

Another vexed question that will have to be answered is the following: In a HR system that has proved to be rigid and inefficient, how can we secure in-house the range of skills needed in the new digital set-up (such as programmers, data scientists and data analysts) as well as other skilled

professionals? Yet, they will be critical to the smooth operation of the National Statistics System.

Ladies and gentlemen

I have explained the particular context of this Workshop. I have also shared with you some personal thoughts for your consideration.

I trust that this workshop will reduce knowledge gaps on big data initiatives and that participants will have explored various possibilities for efficiency gains. It is my hope also that the workshop will pave the way for concrete and workable solutions towards seamless coordinated action within the Mauritian Statistical System.

Rest assured that the Statistics Board, in line with its statutory mission, will give its full support to initiatives and proposals that would promote the quality and integrity of official statistics and improve coordination for development of official statistics.

Thank You for your attention