African Statistics Day 2018

"Data for Development – Opportunities and Challenges"

Welcome address by Director of Statistics

16 November 2018, Intercontinental Mauritius Resort Balaclava fort

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Chairperson of the Statistics Board

Members of the Board

Guests and colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good morning to all you and welcome to this workshop on the occasion of the African Statistics Day 2018.

The theme that we have chosen this year is **Data for Development – Opportunities and challenges.** In the course of today's workshop, we will explore the opportunities that present themselves from the ongoing data deluge and national data initiatives. We shall also look into the challenges that we are facing with both the traditional and non-traditional data sources. The aim is to engage with producers and users of data on the importance of data for development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We, at Statistics Mauritius, are used to traditional data sources such as censuses and surveys. We have acquired the skills and techniques to collect and process such data.   But this does not mean that we are not having hiccups.   New challenges are emerging, such as respondent fatigue and non-contacts.

While censuses and surveys will continue to be an important source of data, we are increasingly turning to the use of administrative sources. This, to improve timeliness, reduce the respondents' burden, and cut costs. Today, some 25% of the budget of the office are spent on censuses and surveys. This would have been much higher, if we were to rely solely on these data collection instruments.

Administrative data are targeted to a purpose other than statistical. They may not be aligned with statistical concepts and definitions. But in many cases, they have good coverage and are timely. The cost of transferring them and adapting them to statistical purposes are well below the cost of collecting similar quality and timely data. For us (statisticians), administrative data are free assets that cannot be ignored.

New data sources are now coming into play – what we call "big data". Although there is no agreed definitfion, big data is often characterized by the 3Vs—high-volume, high-velocity, and high-variety. They are by-products of business and administrative systems and social networks, as a result of people's increasing use

of digital tools such as mobile phones, social networks, internet search engines, and online transactions.

A growing number of studies and applications are shedding light on their enormous potential while a working group the "***Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics***" has been set up by the UN Statistical Commission to provide strategic vision, direction and the coordination of a global programme on big data for official statistics.

Big data are new to statisticians and are not without issues. Just to mention a few - data quality, access, new skills required and technologies, and data privacy.

There's also open data, which refers to **data that are of high quality, are well documented, respect data privacy concerns, in addition to being free, easily accessible.**

In 2015, Government embarked on the Open Data initiative, by developing the National Open Data Policy to create economic value out of Government datasets. Open Data is considered as the bedrock of innovation in the years to come. We will hear more on this initiative from the Chief Technical Officer of the Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation today. He will also present the Information Highway which is a route for exchange of data between government departments in a secure environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We, at Statistics Mauritius, are presently designing a National Strategy for Official Statistics for the period 2019 to 2023 with the assistance of Professor Ben Kiregyera, AfDB Consultant. The new Strategy aims at addressing the evolving data needs for policy making and monitoring, in the context of Government Vision 2030 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, among others.

To date, an assessment of the current state of statistics in priority sectors such as Health, Environment, Labour, Tourism and Education as well as in Statistics Mauritius and Bank of Mauritius has been completed. Prof Kiregyera will present the main findings and will indicate ways of improving our National Statistical System.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finally, I will end with a quote from the biologist and author Edward O. Wilson:

"We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom. The world henceforth will be run by synthesizers, people able to put together the right information at the right time, think critically about it, and make important choices wisely."

I am confident that those astute synthesisers of the future are present here today.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to your active participation.