AFRICAN STATISTICS DAY

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SUPPORTING EDUCATION BY MODERNIZING THE PRODUCTION OF FIT-FOR- PURPOSE STATISTICS
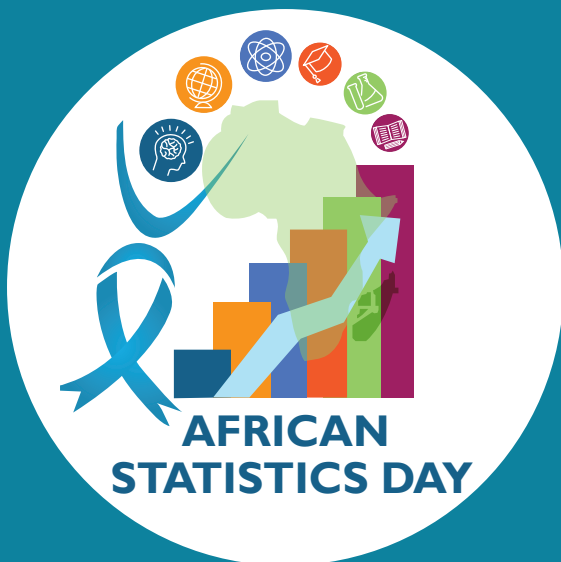
November 18 2024

Background

African Statistics Day is an annual event, celebrated on 18 November to raise public awareness of the importance of statistics in all areas of social and economic life. In 2024, it will be held under the theme "Supporting education by modernizing the production of fit-for-purpose statistics", which encapsulates the call to modernize data ecosystems on the continent, with a view to producing and using high-quality education-related statistics and to seizing the opportunities presented by technological advances and big data.

The education landscape in Africa is dynamic and constantly evolving, characterized by both significant progress and ongoing challenges. Since the mid-2000s, great strides have been made in many African countries with regard to increasing access to primary education: in several subregions, enrolment rates are steadily rising and gender gaps are narrowing. Access to high-quality education remains uneven, however, in particular in rural and conflict-affected areas, where infrastructure is often lacking and trained teachers are frequently in short supply. Furthermore, secondary and tertiary education opportunities are still limited for many people, which impedes the development of a skilled workforce. In most African countries, the net enrolment rate for upper secondary education is below 50 per cent and the adult literacy rate hovers at about 80 per cent, with significant gender disparities.[1] Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach incorporating greater investment in education infrastructure, innovative teaching methods and policies that promote inclusive education for all. By prioritizing education, African States can harness the demographic dividend, drive economic growth and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

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[1] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Education database. Available at https://data.uis.unesco.org/ (accessed on 2 September 2024).

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Modernizing data ecosystems to produce fit-for-purpose education statistics

The modernization of African data ecosystems is crucial to the production of fit-for-purpose education statistics that accurately reflect the unique challenges and opportunities with which the continent is presented. Such modernization involves making use of big data and of advanced data-collection methods, such as digital surveys, mobile data collection and administrative data systems, which enhance the timeliness, quality and relevance of education statistics. By leveraging new technologies, States can gain improved insights into enrolment rates, learning outcomes, teacher distribution and resource allocation. Ultimately, the modernization of data ecosystems will empower African States to make evidence-based decisions that drive educational improvements, promote equity and support sustainable development.

In Africa, it is critical that national statistical systems commit themselves to their role in the modernization of data ecosystems, with a view to informing policy decisions pertaining to the production of education statistics. The statistical community has recognized that compilers of official statistics need to be transformed and modernized in order to adequately respond to all data demands arising from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union; the 10-year strategy 2024–2033 of the African Development Bank; subregional and national development plans; other agendas and frameworks. When such transformations and modernizations are being implemented, due consideration needs to be given to the African Charter on Statistics and to the second Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa, with a view to ensuring the comparability of the education statistics produced by different African States.

While African States and institutions face challenges in respect of the production of reliable and timely education statistics, such as limited resources and inadequate technological infrastructure for data collection and management, they have huge potential for overcoming these challenges. Modernization efforts, including the use of digital tools and the fostering of inter-State collaboration, can significantly enhance the quality and relevance of education data. Such improvements will support evidence-based decision-making, drive meaningful educational reforms and help with the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals across the continent.

United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

African Union

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