UN Big Data Regional Hub for Africa

Webinar Report on 13th StatsTalk-Africa: Understanding the Role of the UN Regional Hub on Big Data and Data Science for Africa in Advancing the Work on Official Statistics

Prepared by

UN Regional Hub on Big Data and Data Science for Africa

https://ecastats.uneca.org/regionalhub

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Introduction

On Tuesday, March 19th, 2024, the African Centre of Statistics (ACS) at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) organized the 13th StatsTalk-Africa webinar entitled "Understanding the Role of the UN Regional Hub on Big Data and Data Science for Africa in advancing the work on official statistics". The StatsTalk-Africa webinars aimed to clarify statistical concepts and methods, enhancing comprehension of alternative data sources such as administrative data, big data, artificial intelligence, and geospatial information. It also highlighted innovative solutions implemented both regionally and globally. The 13th StatsTalk-Africa webinar aimed to explore the significance of the UN Regional Hub on Big Data and Data Science for Africa in advancing the field of official statistics in Africa. The primary focus of the webinar was to delve into the collaborative efforts undertaken within the UN Regional Hub on Big Data and Data Science for Africa. This included discussions on ongoing capacity-building initiatives, projects, planned activities, and other data science endeavours at the African Centre of Statistics (ACS).
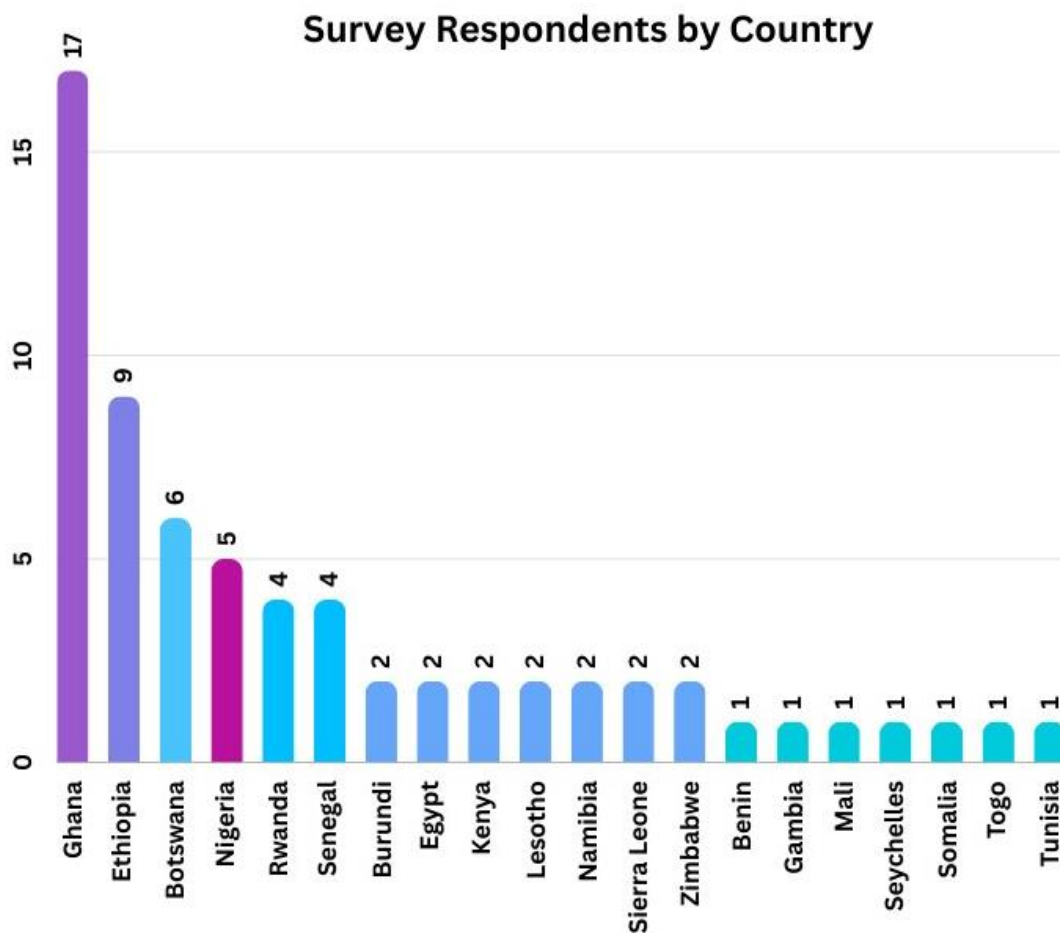
The UN Regional Hub on Big Data and Data Science for Africa is a joint initiative involving the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). Its key objectives encompass facilitating cross-border collaboration projects that leverage big data and data science to complement official statistics, disseminating knowledge on newly developed methods, algorithms, and tools, and providing training on the utilization of big data and data science for the African community of official statisticians.

The event was attended by a diverse audience of more than 200, including young African statisticians, African National Statistical Offices (NSOs), Directors-Generals, UN regional commissions, Regional economic communities, statisticians, data science professionals, and the statistical community. In his opening remarks, *Mr. Oliver Chinganya*, ACS Director and webinar moderator, emphasized the crucial role of the UN Regional Hub on Big Data and Data Science for Africa in empowering African National Statistical Offices (NSOs), National Statistical Systems (NSS), and young African statisticians in the areas of big data, data science, machine learning, and AI to support official statistics. *Mr. Yusuf Murangwa*, Director General of the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), emphasized in his Welcoming Remarks that the UN Regional Hub serves as a centralized repository, providing access to, and analysis of timely data. This initiative aims to ensure that Africa remains at the forefront of the data revolution and is not left behind.

Mr. Claver Gatete, UNECA Executive Secretary, emphasized the paramount importance of data across diverse sectors and stressed that it remains a top priority for ECA. He emphasized the importance of Africa taking a leading role in these advancements, especially in tackling pressing issues such as climate change and advancements in technology. *Mr. Gatete* advocates for leveraging big data, data science, and artificial intelligence to enhance data collection processes and ensure accessibility of information to policymakers. He reaffirms support for such initiatives and emphasizes the Africa Centre for Statistics' pivotal role in leading coordination and fostering knowledge exchange endeavours.

In the first presentation, Ms. Therese Uwimana, Director of Data Revolution and Big Data at the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), provided an overview of the UN Big Data and Data Science Regional Hub for Africa, outlining its current and upcoming activities. The subsequent presentation by Mr. Issoufou Seidou, Principal Statistician at the African Centre for Statistics, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, provided further insights into additional data science initiatives within the African Centre for Statistics during the subsequent presentation. Lastly, the third presentation showcased an award-winning solution presented at the UN Datathon 2023, led by the Ghana Statistics Service.
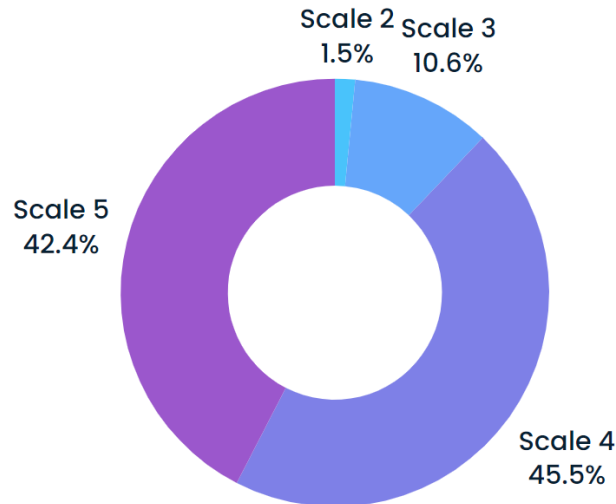
This project, "*Local Access to Information in Ghana: Localizing SDG Indicators and Computing the Novel Access to Information Index*" demonstrated what can be achieved using administrative data and novel methods. Notably, the Ghanaian team secured the first prize in the UN Datathon 2023 and received recognition in three categories: Best Youth Team, Best Visualization, and Best Presentation. A survey form was circulated among participants primarily to measure the effectiveness of the webinar, aiming to pinpoint areas for enhancement and to grasp the audience's requirements for both StatsTalk-Africa and the UN Regional Hub on Big Data and Data Science for Africa. In total, 66 responses were gathered from participants in 20 countries, including Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Togo, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe.

Survey Respondents by Country

1) **On a scale of 1 to 5, How clear and understandable were the presentations and explanations during the webinar?**

Based on the survey findings, one participant rated the presentation as a scale 2, while 7 participants (10.61%) rated it as a scale 3, 30 participants (45.45%) rated it as a scale 4, and 28 participants (42.42%) rated it as a scale 5. The responses demonstrate that the majority of participants, totalling to 87.87%, rated the presentations and explanations during the webinar with a score of 4 or higher, indicating clarity and understanding of the content.
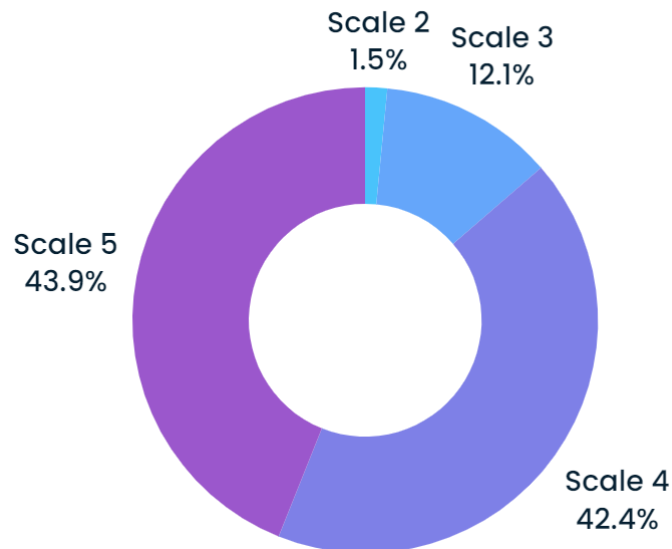
Presentations Clarity and explanations

Scale 2
1.5%

Scale 3
10.6%

Scale 5
42.4%

Scale 4
45.5%

2) Please rate your overall satisfaction with the webinar?

Participants were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the webinar on a scale from 1 to 5. The survey results revealed that no participants rated their satisfaction as a 1, indicating 0% dissatisfaction. One participant (1.52%) rated their satisfaction as a 2, while 8 participants (12.1%) rated it as a 3. The majority of participants, comprising 28 responses (42.42%), rated their satisfaction as a 4. Additionally, 29 participants (43.94%) rated their satisfaction as a 5, indicating the highest level of satisfaction. Overall, the survey responses reflect a positive level of satisfaction among participants, with a significant portion expressing high levels of satisfaction with the webinar.
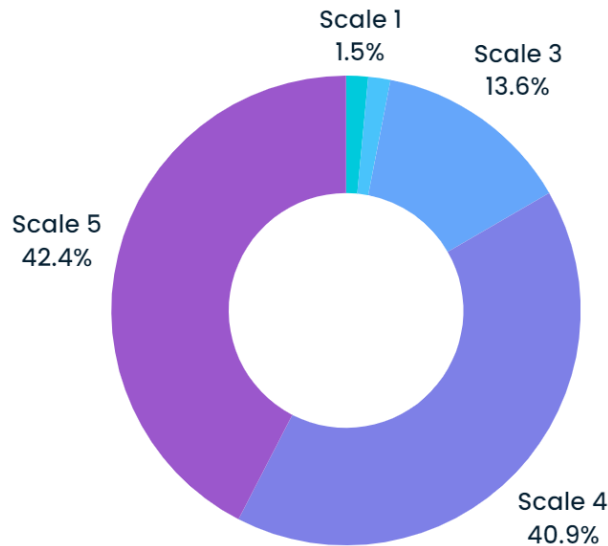
Overall satisfaction with the webinar

Scale 2
1.5%

Scale 3
12.1%

Scale 5
43.9%

Scale 4
42.4%

3) On a scale of 1 to 5, How well-organized was the webinar in terms of schedule and timing?

Participants were asked to assess the organization of the webinar in terms of schedule and timing, rating it on a scale from 1 to 5. The survey results indicated that 1 participant (1.5%) rated the organization as a 1, while another participant (1.5%) rated it as a 2. Additionally, 9 participants (13.6%) rated the organization as a 3. The majority of participants, comprising 27 responses

(40.9%), rated the organization as a 4. Similarly, 28 participants (42.4%) rated it as a 5, reflecting a high level of organization. Overall, the survey responses suggest that the majority of participants found the webinar to be well-organized in terms of schedule and timing.
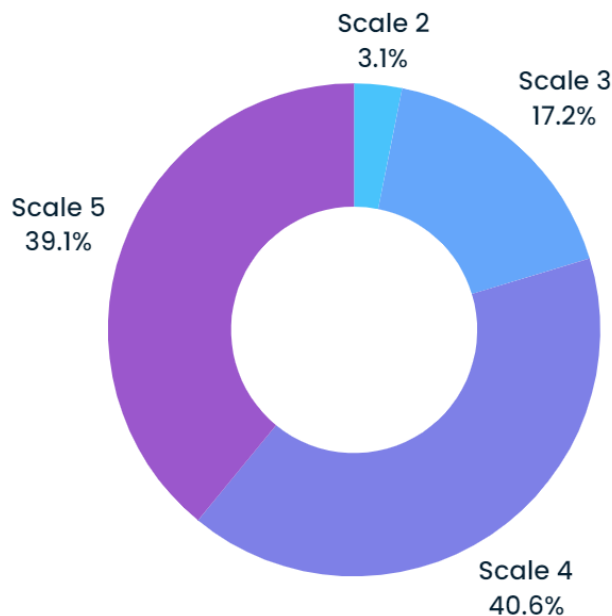
Scheduling and timing of the webinar

4) On a scale of 1 to 5, Did you find the interactive elements (e.g., Q&A sessions) engaging and helpful?

The survey sought feedback on the engagement and usefulness of interactive elements, particularly the Q&A sessions. Results showed that no respondents rated these elements as unengaging or unhelpful. The survey results indicated that 2 participants (3.1%) rated the engagement as a 2, while another participant (17.2%) rated it as a 3. Additionally, 9 participants (13.6%) rated the organization as a 3. The majority of participants, comprising 26 responses (40.6%), rated the engagement as a 4. Similarly, 25 participants (39.1%) rated it as a 5, reflecting a high level of engagement. Overall, the survey responses indicate a substantial level of engagement among the respondents regarding the interactive components of the webinar.
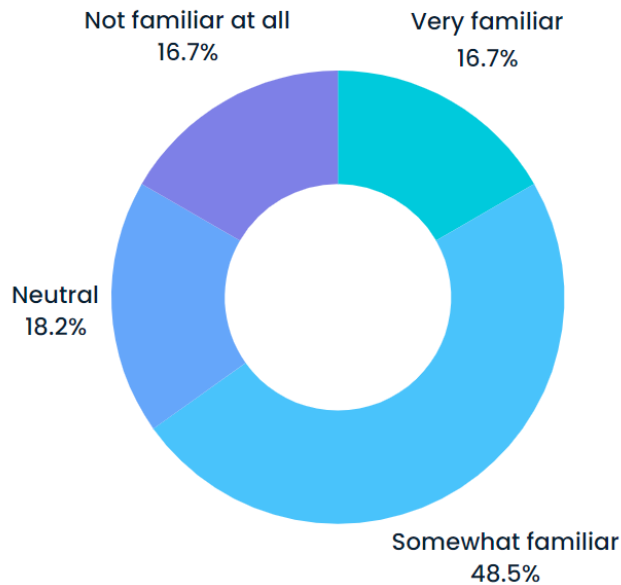
Engagement of the Q&A sessions

5) How familiar are you with the UN Big Data Regional Hub for Africa and its initiatives?

The survey investigated participants' knowledge of the UN Big Data Regional Hub for Africa and its initiatives. Findings revealed a spectrum of familiarity among respondents: 16.7% claimed to be highly familiar, 48.5% reported a moderate level of familiarity, 18.2% remained neutral, and 16.7% acknowledged being entirely unfamiliar with the subject matter.
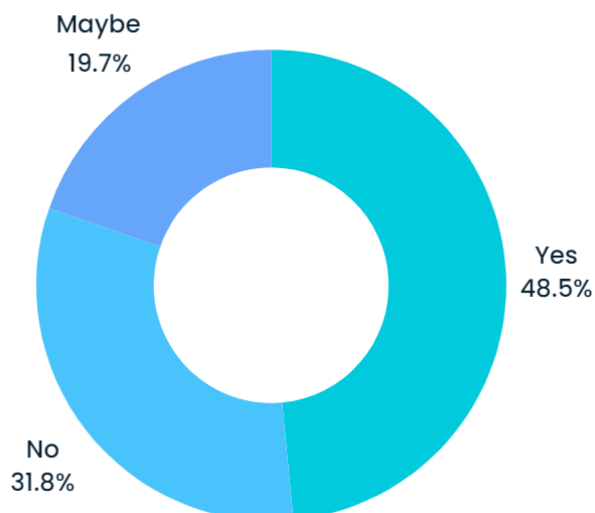
Familiarity with the UN Big Data Regional Hub for Africa

Not familiar at all
16.7%

Very familiar
16.7%

Neutral
18.2%

Somewhat familiar
48.5%

6) Have you or your organization actively engaged or participated in any activities (webinars, events, workshops, seminars) organized by the UN Big Data Regional Hub for Africa in the past year?

The survey sought to understand whether participants or their organizations had actively engaged or participated in any activities, such as webinars, events, workshops, or seminars, organized by the UN Big Data Regional Hub for Africa within the past year. Results revealed that 48.5% of respondents indicated they had indeed participated in such activities, while 31.8% reported no engagement. Additionally, 19.7% of participants expressed uncertainty regarding their involvement in these activities.
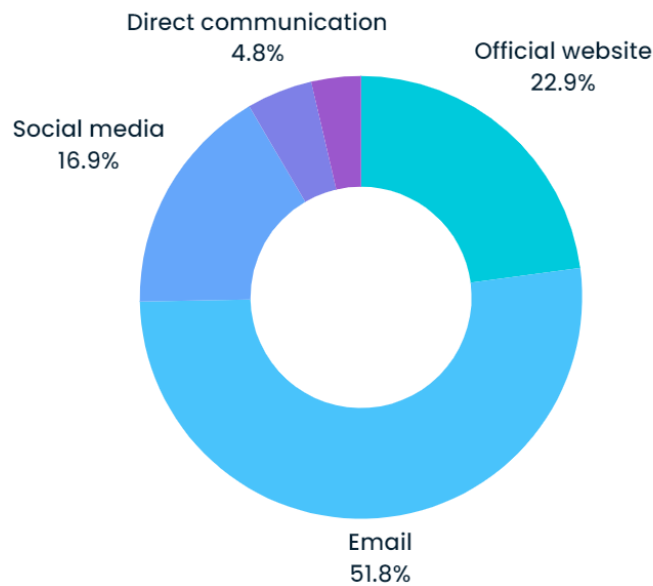
Engaging with activities of the UN Big Data Regional Hub

Maybe
19.7%

Yes
48.5%

No
31.8%

7) How do you usually receive information about the UN Big Data Regional Hub for Africa? (Select all that apply)

Participants were asked how they had communicated with the UN Big Data Regional Hub for Africa in the past. The majority, accounting for 51.8% of respondents, reported using email as their primary mode of communication. Additionally, 22.9% mentioned visiting the official website for updates, while 16.9% relied on social media platforms. A smaller percentage, 4.8%, stated that they had communicated directly with the Hub, and 3.6% cited other unspecified channels.
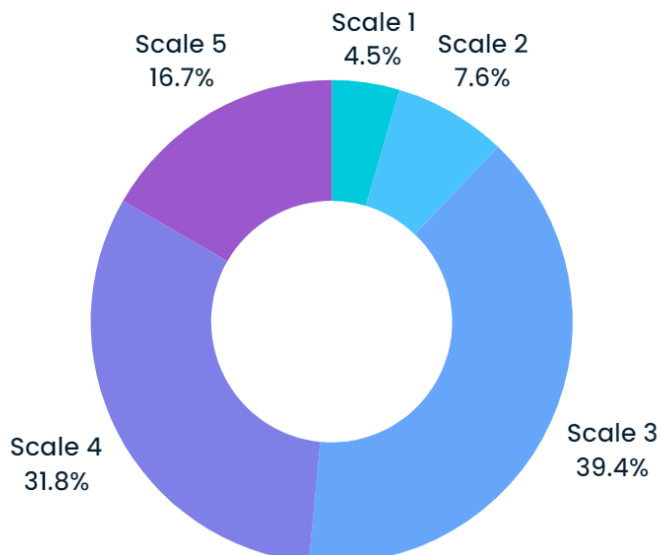
Communication channels with the hub

8) On a scale of 1-5, how accessible are the resources and tools provided by the UN Big Data Region Hub for Africa?

Participants were asked to rate the accessibility of resources and tools provided by the UN Big Data Regional Hub for Africa on a scale of 1 to 5. The responses varied, with 4.5% indicating a score of 1, 7.6% rating it as 2, 39.4% selecting 3, 31.8% choosing 4, and 16.7% giving a rating of 5.

Accessibility of the hub resources

9) Please provide any suggestions you have for improving the visibility of the UN Big Data Region Hub for Africa among the NSOs, NSS, and statistical community?

The main comments and suggestions provided by the respondents can be categorized into several key areas:

- **Engagement with National Statistical Offices (NSOs)**: Participants suggested engaging more with individual NSOs and assisting them with international best practices on leveraging big data. Some also recommended planning missions to NSOs to understand their challenges better.

- **Capacity Building and Training**: There was a significant emphasis on the need for capacity building in data science and the utilization of big data tools and techniques. Participants expressed interest in knowing the modalities and steps for scaling up such projects to other member countries. Recommendations included providing training on using different data sources and applying data science tools for reliable statistics.

- **Establishment of Unified African Statistical Society**: Some participants proposed establishing a unified African Statistical Society similar to the American Statistical Association. This body could organize conferences, webinars, and funding opportunities to promote awareness and growth in data-driven research involving advanced statistical models.

- **Sponsorship and Incorporation of Young Statisticians**: Suggestions were made to provide sponsorship and involve young statisticians in research on big data and data science.

- **Resource Allocation and Dedicated Teams**: Participants highlighted the need for more resources for the hub to expand its reach to other NSOs. They also suggested establishing dedicated teams for each country, monitored by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

- **Visibility and Awareness**: Suggestions were made to increase the visibility of the UN Big Data Regional Hub for Africa through more webinars, workshops, and enhanced social media presence. Some participants proposed constant sharing of information about the hub via email for quick updates.

- **Academic Integration and Practical Workshops**: Participants recommended integrating the hub with the academic community and organizing practical workshops to address connectivity issues faced during webinars.

- **African Francophone Representation**: Concerns were raised about the representation of French-speaking countries and the need to include them in discussions and initiatives.

- **Support for National Statistical Systems (NSS)**: Participants emphasized providing tailored support and training initiatives to NSOs and NSS to enhance their capabilities in leveraging big data effectively.

These feedback points provide valuable insights into the areas of improvement and future directions for the UN Big Data Regional Hub for Africa.