Trends of Statistical Training and Human Resources Development in Africa

Studies commissioned for the African Group on Statistical Training (AGROST) by the African Centre for Statistics, UNECA

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1. Background

In the recent past, African countries and development partners have increasingly recognized the need for better statistics to design policies informed by evidence and for decision making. Statistics are an essential support for policy implementation as well as for monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes in order to understand the impact of development initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs). So, the need for meeting increased and various demand of statistics combined with the necessity to use new methodologies and tools has raised crucial challenge in terms of statistical capacity of most African countries. Thus, training and human resources development have been identified as one of the main challenges facing the development of statistics in African National Statistical Systems (NSSs).

Indeed, a few number of African Statistical Training Centres (STC) have been created in a regional basis since the sixtieth and many professionals have been trained outside the region but the African region is still facing the lack of critical volume of statisticians in quantity as well as for emergent subjects. In their quest to address challenges related to the pressing demand, more and more countries have created national centres within the National Statistical Offices or operated statistical curricula within national universities.

Beside commendable countries efforts, regional and international partners have set up a number of initiatives and engaged in various activities aimed at enhancing the statistical training capacity of African countries through the following:

- The African Statistical Coordination Committee (ASCC) Working Group on Statistical Training;
- The African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) Group (to be set up) to accompany this organization’s specific project on statistical training; and
The Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa) Working Group on Statistical Training;

In order to coordinate and synergize all initiatives and activities on statistical training in the region, the Statistical Commission for Africa (StatCom-Africa), in its January 2010 session, has endorsed the African Group on Statistical Training and Human Resources (AGROST) as one of its working groups. Since then, AGROST has adopted one Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA) for the three coming years and also a statistical training programme in the framework of the Global Strategy for Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics through the African Implementation Plan. Beside, ECA has provided AGROST with a full time dedicated staff to coordinate the Secretariat of AGROST.

While elaborating its mandate, AGROST members stressed the urgent need for developing four studies that will constitute a foundation of all future activities in statistical training and human resources development in Africa. These studies are:

- A compendium of African Statistical Training Centres;
- A review of statistical curricula;
- Harmonisation and standardisation of statistical curricula and qualifications; and
- A statistical training needs and capacity assessment.

In support to this commitment, UNECA has commissioned the undertaking of these studies by assigning experienced consultants for each area topic. These studies are now complete and their final draft reports are attached in this CD-ROM consolidated as one document.

2. Objective of the studies

With regard to the increasing number of STCs, statistics departments within universities and national statistical training centres in the NSOs and the need for coordinating initiatives and harmonising and standardising statistical curricula and qualifications, the main objective of this consultancy is to produce one comprehensive study that will provide with a) a holistic list of
African statistical training centres including statistics departments within universities and national statistical centres managed by national statistical offices; b) a review of statistical curricula; c) a statistical training needs and capacity assessment; and d) a strategy for harmonizing and standardising statistical curricula and qualifications.

3. About the Studies

3.1. Compendium of Statistical Training Centres in Africa

As the title suggests, the compendium of statistical training centres gives a landscape of the centres and their activities as well as contacts. This study has identified more than 80 statistical training centres in Africa running statistical courses as specific departments within universities or independent national or regional institutions. Concise information about the training centres, their training programmes and capacities as well as contact information has been provided. Efforts have been made to ensure that the information about each centre is as recent and up-to-date as possible. Still, some training centres in the continent have not provided fully updated information which makes the study somewhat incomplete. However, it is a good source of information and provides a tangible landscape of statistical training centres in Africa. This compendium was compiled by Professor Gane Samba Lo of the University Gaston Berger of Saint-Louis in Dakar, Senegal.

3.2. A Review of Statistical Training Curricula

The review of statistical training centres in Africa provides an overview of the various training programmes and levels available in the continent. The review touches up the concentration areas in statistics related to Mathematical Statistics, Statistics and Computer Science, General Applied Statistics, Statistics and Economics, Demography, Biostatistics, Actuarial Science, and «Professional » statistics. As a result the findings of this study detail the structure of curricula offered by STCs, the distribution of curricula according to the programme types, the distribution of programmes according to the four language zone in the continent (English, French, Arabic and Portuguese), the distribution of programmes
according to the fields of concentration as well as a comparison of programmes content between these various institutions. This study was undertaken by Mr. Wilfrid Granger, an independent freelance consultant based in France.

3.3. Statistical Training Needs and Capacity Assessment
This study was conducted with the objective of gauging the demand and supply of statistical training in Africa. The analysis is based on information available with regards to the most recent training curricula and programmes of the centres as well as their intake and output of graduates. As data on such issues were scantly available for most countries across the continent, the results of the analysis are limited to a few countries and with limited output. However, the methodology utilized for this purpose is sound and applicable for more countries with up-to-date data on intake and output. Therefore, it has been presented here for its analytical methodology and potential of scaling up the analysis. This analytical component will further be updated when such data are obtained in the nearest future. The study is conducted by Mr. Neil Dourmashkin, a freelance consultant based on Luxembourg.

3.4. Strategies for Harmonization and Standardization of Statistical Curricula and Qualification
The focus of the study is to forward strategies on harmonization and standardization of statistical training curricula and qualifications in Africa. The findings of the other three studies revealed that there are scattered statistical training approaches as well as qualification making it difficult to compare and contrast trainings, systems and qualification. As a result this study proposes three distinct approaches for harmonizing statistical training and providing comparable qualification for the same. It was based on existing curricula and information in the four language regions in the continent. The study also proposes specific action plan and resources required to implement chosen harmonization and standardization processes. This strategy is developed by Professor Adebayo T. Bamiduro of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.