

**PARIS21 and OECD World Forum regional pre-conference for
Africa**
“Building Capacity to Measure and Foster the Progress of Societies”
Conference Conclusions
14 January 2007

This conference was arranged by the OECD and PARIS21, with assistance from Statistics South Africa and the Rwandan Statistics Office.

37 Countries from Africa attended this meeting, along with delegates from the African Development Bank, UNECA, the World Bank, the World Health Organisation, Afristat, SESTRIC etc. (see attached file for full attendance list).

After some welcoming remarks and an introduction to the OECD World Forum project, the conference discussed “What is Progress and How to Measure It”. It was noted that, while indicator sets such as the MDGs were valuable, there was also value in countries designing their own sets of progress measures for themselves that could engage a wide group of stakeholders in their construction, reflect national views of progress and be culturally appropriate. There was discussion about the professional boundaries for national statisticians: should they simply report the facts or undertake analysis? What was the correct balance of power between policy makers and the statisticians?

The session “Measuring Progress: Bringing statistics, policy makers and society closer together” discussed ways in which statistics could be brought to the attention of a wider audience and in particular the need to develop closer relationships with the media to foster a wider understanding of the fitness for purpose of official statistics.

The session “What statistical capacity do we need to measure progress” underlined the demands already places on statistical offices to report indicators, the need for more resources to collect statistics at sub national level, and the need for support from organisations like PARIS21 to continue to help build capacity to undertake this work.

The final session on “The Future for International Indicators” discussed what role the OECD project could play in designing the post 2015 system that would follow the MDGs. It was noted that statisticians ought to try to be more proactive in having a stronger voice in the design of a subsequent system and try hard to find opportunities to get involved in the process and become aware early in the game when indicator sets were being developed. Perhaps the OECD could help in this area.

Conclusions

There seemed to be strong support for the development of national sets of progress measures. Though some countries could see this as sitting somewhat outside the role of NSOs, it was felt that NSOs were better placed than other organisations to develop these measures.

Moreover, sets of progress measures could strengthen the role and influence of NSOs by

- Acting as a focal point for helping NSOs to refine their work program
- Provide an opportunity, through consultations on areas of progress and their indicators, to strengthen ties with policy makers, NGOs and the media
- Help to enable NSOs to reach a broad audience

- Strengthen the role of NSOs in providing analysis as well as simply publishing data
- Help to ensure that international sets of development measures reflected issues that were important and culturally appropriate to each country.

In summary, Mr Lehohla noted that the OECD project, and Istanbul conference offered a significant opportunity for African statisticians to strengthen the role of statistics in decision making, and that it was an opportunity that should not be missed. He suggested the UNECA could be approached to help coordinate this process. He also encouraged African countries to participate in the Istanbul Forum.

Mr Chenais said that PARIS21 would support this work, especially with regards to statistical capacity building. They might, for example, consider running sessions in countries to discuss the project. Some of these sessions could tie into the live webcasts of the Istanbul forum.

Mr Hall said the OECD stood ready to support countries wanting to develop their own sets of progress measures. Although it was important that countries did this for themselves, the OECD would try to help facilitate this work (through workshops for instance, and a forthcoming statistical book). Some regional champions for Africa – countries that could begin such projects and inspire the rest of the continent – were important. He invited all present to attend the Istanbul meeting and said the OECD would, where possible, help with financial support to attend the meeting. He would also seek suggestions for African speakers at the conference.

Dr Savas Alpay (SESTRIC) commented from the floor that his organisation stood ready to support attendance at the conference from the 27 African countries that were members of the OIC.

Next Steps

The OECD would invite all chief statisticians from Africa to attend the Istanbul Conference and would approach some people with invitations to play a formal role, as well as seek suggestions for other African speakers.

Paris21 would discuss ways in which they could help facilitate the involvement of Africa in the Istanbul conference and related project and would keep countries informed.

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