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**Strengthening the role of statistics in reflecting African
development realities****Strengthening the role of data and statistics in
connecting African development aspirations and
realities****I. Introduction**

1. In the present document, African development aspirations should be understood as the social, economic, environmental and governance outcomes set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, national development plans and regional integration frameworks. African development realities should be understood as the structural conditions and lived experiences of the people, economies and territories of the continent, including conditions that may be concealed by national averages. Statistical systems make it possible to connect those aspirations and those conditions by translating policy objectives into measurable goals and by showing whether progress is being made towards those goals, where it is being made and which population groups and territories are converging towards, or diverging from, them.

2. Statistics depicting that connection are becoming increasingly important. Demographic change, urbanization, informal labour, inequality, climate risks, displacement, digitalization and regional integration are altering both development conditions and the evidence needed for policymaking. Official statistics remain indispensable, but they are not always sufficiently timely, disaggregated, integrated or interpreted in relation to the structural drivers of development. The issue is therefore not simply whether more indicators are needed, but whether statistical systems can serve as a conduit through which policy ambitions can be coherently transformed into decision-making, implementation and accountability frameworks.

3. The present document contains an assessment of how well statistical evidence available in Africa captures the continent's aspirations and realities, a review of longstanding, context-specific and emerging challenges, and proposals for strategic directions, mechanisms for implementation and points for consideration by the Statistical Commission for Africa. It is intended for heads of national statistics offices, other institutions in national statistical systems, regional and pan-African institutions and institutional partners that

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support the development of statistics. It is part of the implementation of the roadmap for the transformation and modernization of official statistics in Africa, 2023-2030, in particular by providing guidance to break out of the vicious cycle of official statistics. Its central argument is that official statistics should remain independent and internationally comparable as their role evolves from that of tools for retrospective reporting to trusted public tools for policymaking. The objective is not simply to generate data for its own sake, but as evidence that is produced sustainably, interpreted correctly and used to improve policy decisions and development outcomes. Progress should ultimately be assessed by whether better evidence helps to improve quality, timeliness and accountability in the implementation of the development agenda.

II. African development priorities and the evolution of national statistical systems

4. Statistical systems in Africa have been evolving in response to successive development priorities. When African colonies were securing their independence, their main concerns were sovereign State-building, national planning, industrialization, agricultural transformation and the expansion of basic services. Countries enhanced their population censuses, national accounts, price and agricultural statistics and reporting of administrative data. Those measures helped to establish essential national functions, but the statistical systems inherited from the colonial administrations remained better equipped to measure formal production, trade and population totals than social conditions, informal labour and territorial inequalities.

5. Following the economic crises and structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 1990s, demand for fiscal, monetary, debt and trade statistics increased. The social consequences of adjustment also created stronger demand for evidence on poverty, employment, health, education and living conditions. The use of household surveys and social indicators increased, but irregular reporting cycles, fragmented administrative records, weak coordination and project-based financing limited continuity and national ownership.

6. From the 2000s to the mid-2010s, poverty reduction strategies, the Millennium Development Goals, public service delivery and results-based management placed internationally comparable social indicators at the centre of national and international reporting. Countries improved their household surveys, poverty measurement, gender statistics, health and education monitoring, statistical legislation and national strategies for the development of statistics. Although cooperation and harmonization across the continent helped to improve coverage and comparability, the predominance of projects focused on individual indicators often led to underfunding for recurrent statistical operations and institutional integration.

7. Since the mid-2010s, the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063, the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, climate resilience, peace and security, digital transformation and the commitment to leave no one behind have created a need for a broader range of statistics. These priorities require evidence on structural transformation, productive capacity, regional value chains, informal cross-border trade, quality employment, food systems, governance, climate vulnerability and population groups that may be overlooked in national averages. The African Charter on Statistics, the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa and the road map for the transformation and modernization of official statistics in Africa, 2023–2030 provide important normative and operational frameworks for the further strengthening of statistical systems. These developments are summarized in table 1.

Table 1
Evolution of African development priorities, statistical responses and persistent gaps

<i>Period</i>	<i>Development priority</i>	<i>Statistical response</i>	<i>Continuing gap</i>
Post-independence	State-building, planning, agriculture and services	Censuses, national accounts, prices and administrative reporting, establishment of statistics offices and training centres	Social conditions, informality and territorial disparities
1980s–1990s	Adjustment, debt management and social protection	Macroeconomic, poverty, labour, health and education statistics (Addis Ababa) Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa, Yaoundé Declaration on Statistical Development in Africa	Irregular production, fragmentation and weak financing
2000s–mid-2010s	Poverty reduction, global goals and accountability	Expanded surveys, social indicators, strategies and harmonization (Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity Building in Africa, African Charter on Statistics, Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa, etc.)	Project dependence and indicator-by-indicator reporting
Mid-2010s onward	2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063, African Continental Free Trade Area, resilience and digitalization	African statistical frameworks and modernization of geospatial and administrative data (Africa data consensus, Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, Continental programmes on geospatial-statistical integration and administrative data modernization, road map for transformation and modernization of official statistics in Africa, etc.)	Uneven interoperability, gaps in measuring context-specific issues and insufficient use of statistics

Source: Author's compilation.

8. A further development has been the recognition that outcomes have a spatial dimension. Integration of statistical and geospatial information strengthens census and survey operations, small-area estimation, disaster-risk management, climate adaptation and identification of territories at risk of being left behind. The United Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework and the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework provide common principles, but implementation remains uneven and dependent on individual projects. More systematic integration would enable national statistical systems to show not only the progress made but also where services, opportunities, vulnerabilities and productive potential are concentrated.

9. The goal should therefore be to build on existing statistical systems, rather than to replace them. Core statistics need to be maintained and produced more regularly, with a combination of administrative records, civil registration data, geospatial information and other appropriate data sources used to answer clearly defined policy questions. Development priorities should be translated into statistical requirements, including what is to be measured, for whom, at what geographical level, from which sources, at what frequency and for which decisions. Existing statistics should be presented through policy briefs,

scenarios, dashboards and local profiles that help users understand causes, trade-offs and obstacles to implementation.

10. While capabilities and constraints differ across countries and statistical areas, a common challenge is that the breadth and pace of the current development agenda in Africa exceed the capabilities of statistical systems designed mainly for periodic production and external reporting. Moving forward, policymakers should ensure to preserve comparability while giving greater prominence to African priorities, strengthening national ownership and making official statistics more accessible and useful throughout the policy cycle. National statistical strategies should also be linked more directly to development plans, medium-term expenditure frameworks and annual government programmes so that priority statistics are planned, financed, produced and used as part of continuous government processes.

III. Statistics and development realities in Africa

11. Development realities in Africa illustrate the importance of interpreting statistics as part of an analytical chain rather than as isolated headline figures. Between 1970 and 2024, real gross domestic product (GDP) in Africa grew by about 3.5 per cent a year, compared with a global average of about 3.1 per cent. Average annual growth in per capita GDP, however, was about 0.8 per cent, equivalent to half the global rate. Economic growth therefore did not consistently translate into rapid improvements in average material living standards.

12. This can be explained in part by rapid population growth and slow, uneven structural transformation. Agriculture employs about 42 per cent of the workforce in Africa but remains substantially less productive than the wider economy. Workers leaving agriculture often move into low-productivity areas like services rather than higher-productivity areas like manufacturing. Social progress is similarly mixed: school enrolment, access to basic services and life expectancy have improved, but learning outcomes, service quality and labour market transitions remain uneven. For example, according to the World malaria report 2025,¹ the World Health Organization African Region still accounted for about 94 per cent of global malaria cases (265 million cases) and 95 per cent of malaria deaths (579 000 deaths) in 2024.

13. National statistical systems provide the evidence needed to understand these patterns. They are generally strongest in areas in which demand, methods and financing have long been institutionalized, with data including macroeconomic aggregates and prices, censuses, household surveys and selected demographic, health, education, gender and labour measures. These strengths show what can be achieved when policy demands, standards, financing and clear institutional responsibility are aligned. The existence of a data source, however, does not necessarily mean that usable statistics are available: data may be released late, be inaccessible or insufficiently disaggregated, or lack adequate quality assurance and integration with other sources.

¹ World Health Organization, *World Malaria Report 2025*. Available at <https://www.who.int/teams/global-malaria-programme/reports/world-malaria-report-2025>.

14. Coverage of priority development issues remains incomplete. According to the Africa Sustainable Development Report 2024,² for Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17, only 54 of 83 indicators had sufficient data for assessment; 29 had insufficient data, including 8 for which no African country had data. Only 26 African countries had fully funded national statistical plans in 2022. The most persistent gaps concern phenomena that are informal, localized, rapidly changing, politically sensitive or difficult to observe, including employment quality, informal cross-border trade, unpaid care, pastoral livelihoods, climate vulnerability, governance, displacement, disability and conditions in fragile settings.

15. Headline indicators can also present an incomplete picture. In a recent analysis,³ the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) estimated unemployment in Africa at about 6.3 per cent, compared with underemployment of 9.8 per cent, vulnerable employment of 70.8 per cent, working poverty of 35.6 per cent and informal employment of 84.4 per cent. The unemployment rate alone may understate labour market difficulties, because many people cannot afford to remain without work and prefer to enter informal, insecure or low productivity employment. Unemployment should therefore be considered alongside earnings, hours, informality, working poverty, social protection and the share of young people not in employment, education or training.

16. Indicators also need to be interpreted jointly in other policy areas. GDP measures production but not distribution, job quality or multidimensional well-being. In a comparative study for 2010–2024,⁴ ECA found that roughly one third of national and international estimates of GDP in local currency differed by at least 3 percentage points, reflecting differences in benchmark years, revisions, exchange rates and vintages. Agricultural output does not show post-harvest losses, market access or food-system resilience. School enrolment does not measure learning. Access to services does not show reliability, affordability or quality. National averages can conceal deprivation in remote rural areas, informal settlements, border regions and territories affected by conflict.

17. The usefulness of statistics also depends on timeliness and national ownership. In an analytical study,⁵ ECA found an average interval of about 3.1 years between national observations used to measure unemployment, with much longer gaps in several countries. According to the first Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2014–2023) of Agenda 2063, only about one third of the data required for monitoring development were produced directly by national statistical systems; the remainder depended on estimates or model-based calculations or were unavailable. When continental monitoring is not based on sustainable national systems, national accountability is weakened and policymakers have less timely evidence with which to adjust their policy implementation.

18. Internationally comparable indicators should therefore be retained but organized into coherent sets. For each policy question, producers and users should identify the principal indicator, what it measures and does not measure,

² African Union Commission, African Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme and Economic Commission for Africa, *2024 Africa Sustainable Development Report: Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions* (Addis Ababa, 2024). Available at <https://www.uneca.org/africa-sustainable-development-report-2024>.

³ Economic Commission for Africa, *Labour market statistics in Africa: status and implications for policy discussions* (forthcoming, 2026). The figures cited are continental estimates and should be interpreted in accordance with the source definitions and reference periods.

⁴ United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, *Gross domestic product statistics in Africa: status and implications for policy discussions* (forthcoming, 2026).

⁵ Economic Commission for Africa, African Centre for Statistics, *Unemployment statistics in Africa: status and implications for policy discussions*, Africa Beyond the Numbers series, working paper (June 2026).

the complementary evidence required, the appropriate level of disaggregation, and the source, reference period and revision status of the data used. The objective is not to create a separate statistical framework for Africa, but to complement international standards where necessary so that they address policy questions of relevance to Africa.

19. Overall, available statistics are only partly aligned with development priorities and observed conditions in Africa. Official statistics cover many important elements, but significant gaps remain. The problem is not simply that some indicators are missing. In many priority areas, there is no comprehensive process linking a policy objective to concepts, data sources, frequency, disaggregation, analysis, dissemination and use. Consequently, monitoring of continental commitments may depend on external estimates or irregular projects, while the people and territories with the greatest needs may remain the least visible in official statistics.

IV. Challenges affecting statistical systems in Africa

20. Three broad sets of challenges limit the ability of statistical systems to reflect development realities in Africa: longstanding weaknesses in statistical value chains; context-specific measurement challenges arising from the characteristics of African economies, societies and institutions; and emerging challenges associated with the new data ecosystem. These effects are cumulative. Inadequate financing delays production; fragmented institutions prevent available data from being combined; limited dissemination reduces use and demand from policymakers; and digital innovation without adequate governance can exacerbate inequalities between countries, institutions and population groups.

A. Longstanding institutional and production challenges

21. Data availability remains the most visible constraint, but failure to produce data is only part of the problem. Countries may collect information through censuses, surveys and administrative systems but release it late, interrupt time series, provide limited metadata or fail to make the underlying data available for reuse. Census tables may be published long after enumeration; a survey may result in a single report without accessible microdata; and sectoral records may remain dispersed across institutions. Effective dissemination requires release calendars, accessible reports, downloadable data sets, metadata, controlled access to microdata and application programming interfaces, and respect for statistical confidentiality.

22. Quality, comparability and continuity also remain uneven. Informal cross-border trade is not fully incorporated into merchandise trade statistics in most countries. Labour surveys are conducted irregularly, nationally produced estimates and modelled international estimates may differ and changes in concepts and definitions can create breaks in time series. GDP estimates may differ across national and international sources because of benchmark years, revisions and vintages. Concepts, coverage, reference periods, revisions and modelling status should therefore be specified in statistical releases, and significant discrepancies should be verified and reconciled before the statistics are used for policymaking.

23. Insufficient disaggregation obscures inequalities among women and men, young people and older persons, persons with and without disabilities, urban and rural communities, formal and informal settlements and territories with differing levels of connectivity. At the same time, large numbers of indicators can make interpretation difficult. Monetary poverty, multidimensional poverty, per capita income, human development and

subjective well-being all capture different aspects of development and therefore answer different analytical questions. A statistical taxonomy is needed to explain the concept, purpose and limitations of each measure and its relationship to complementary indicators, rather than a single universal ranking.

24. Interpretation and statistical literacy are related challenges. Policymakers, journalists and the public may compare figures based on different concepts, definitions, periods or sources, or treat modelled estimates as direct observations. Improving the quality of metadata and communication is therefore as important as increasing the volume of statistical output. Dialogues between producers and users of data, including engagement with parliaments and the media, and policy briefs remain useful, but isolated activities have limited effect. They should instead form part of sustained efforts to promote statistical literacy, beginning in primary school and continuing through the regular production of evidence designed to support decision-making.

25. Institutional fragmentation limits both production and use. National statistics offices often have legal mandates to coordinate national statistical systems, but those mandates do not automatically ensure regular data flows from ministries, local governments, central banks, regulators or other data holders. Second-generation governance is required, in the form of operational regulations, agreements, common classifications, quality standards, secure linkage arrangements and functioning coordination bodies. Structured links with ministries responsible for finance and planning and with institutions responsible for policy analysis are also needed so that policy questions can inform work programmes without compromising methodological independence.

26. Human-resource constraints include poor staff retention and a lack of professional incentives and training. Data science, geospatial analysis, management and integration of administrative data, confidentiality protection and policy analysis require specialized skills and continuous learning. Limited career progression and recognition contribute to staff turnover, loss of institutional memory and dependence on short-term, externally financed assignments. Capacity development should include professional career structures, adequate incentives, communities of practice and recognition of statisticians as both accountable public servants and independent technical professionals.

27. Financing should be understood as a systemic requirement rather than an episodic intervention. Short project cycles can distort national priorities, create parallel platforms and leave recurrent statistical operations unfunded. A self-reinforcing cycle can result in delayed or inaccessible statistics, reduced use and attention from policymakers. In turn, weak demand reduces funding and inadequate funding further weakens production and dissemination. Breaking this vicious cycle requires predictable domestic financing, coordinated partner support, credible and costed statistical programmes, accessible outputs and clear evidence that official statistics serve and are used in decision-making.

B. Measurement challenges specific to conditions in Africa

28. Institutions in Africa do not participate equally in the development, testing and refinement of international statistical methodologies and they are often users rather than co-designers of global standards. Some concepts, however, need to be interpreted in a context-specific manner. For example, access to an improved water source does not necessarily show whether water is safe, reliable, affordable or available when needed. Informal labour, pastoral systems, seasonal livelihoods, customary land arrangements, unpaid care, local

deprivation, governance, conflict and displacement require measurement approaches that reflect conditions in Africa while remaining internationally comparable.

29. Reporting obligations can also divert statistical capacity away from the production of nationally and regionally relevant evidence. The “two agendas, one plan” approach has the potential to reduce duplication between the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, but harmonization should not lead to the marginalization of policy questions of relevance to Africa. Institutions in Africa should therefore play a stronger role in the development of methodologies. National statistics offices, regional economic communities, pan-African institutions, universities and research centres should jointly identify priorities, test methods, document country experiences and bring validated results into international standard-setting processes.

30. Collecting statistics is particularly difficult in places where needs are greatest. Insecurity, displacement, mobility, weak administration and restricted access disrupt censuses, surveys and routine reporting. Adapted surveys, small-area estimation, geospatial tools and partnerships with administrative and humanitarian organizations have the potential to improve coverage, but require explicit safeguards in relation to confidentiality and informed risk assessment and do-no-harm principles. Inclusive statistics require not only disaggregation but also methods that can be used to reach populations omitted from conventional sampling frames.

C. Contemporary and emerging challenges

31. Administrative registers, geospatial information, data from mobile devices and digital platforms, data held by private companies and artificial intelligence can help to improve timeliness, granularity and early warnings. They should complement, not replace, censuses, surveys, civil registration and national accounts. Much of this information is generated outside official statistical systems and may be difficult to access, commercially sensitive, unstable or poorly documented. Data from mobile devices and digital platforms may exclude people without access to the relevant devices or services, while model-based estimates may be based on opaque assumptions.

32. Use of these sources requires lawful access, assessments of representativeness, transparent methods, common metadata, quality assurance and ethical governance. Linking administrative and digital data raises questions of confidentiality, consent, anonymization, cybersecurity, algorithmic bias and accountability. Different classifications, identifiers and formats can impede the integration of data from household and enterprise sources and from tax, customs, health, education and geospatial systems. Partnerships with private sector and other non-State data holders must be built in a manner that facilitates the protection of privacy and commercial interests while preventing official statistics from becoming dependent on opaque or externally controlled sources and helping to reduce or control the costs of producing official statistics.

33. Advanced data sources require secure infrastructure, data science skills, legal expertise and sustained investment. Countries and institutions with greater resources may be able to modernize their statistical systems more quickly, widening existing gaps. New methods and technologies should therefore be introduced at a pace suited to the maturity of each statistical system, supported by shared regional tools and standards and by investment in core statistical systems. Regional cooperation can help to reduce costs through shared methods, training, secure infrastructure and peer review, but it should help to strengthen national systems rather than to create parallel continental platforms. The constraints on modernization are therefore not only technological; they concern institutions, methodologies and political and strategic choices.

Technology cannot be a substitute for effective governance, professional capacity, sustainable financing and public trust.

V. Strategic directions for ensuring that statistics reflect development realities

34. The preceding analysis points to five mutually reinforcing directions for retaining strong core official statistics and international comparability and improving their relevance, integration, inclusion, timeliness and use. Countries should follow these directions in a sequential manner suited to the maturity of their statistical systems and priorities. Isolated measures will have limited effect: technology without appropriate governance, additional indicators without a coherent framework and new methods without sustainable financing will not produce lasting improvements.

A. Expanding the use of statistics beyond retrospective reporting

35. In addition to describing past conditions, official statistics should be used to support assessment, prioritization, budgeting, implementation, evaluation and accountability. Statistical programmes should be based on clearly defined policy questions and user needs, while decisions on concepts, methods and release remain under the independent authority of official statisticians. National statistics offices should maintain structured working relationships with ministries responsible for finance and planning, sectoral ministries and agencies, local governments, central banks, parliaments, universities, civil society and the media.

36. Traditional reports should be complemented by concise policy briefs, dashboards, geospatial profiles, trend analyses, early warning tools and scenarios, and evaluation tools. In these products, statisticians should explain uncertainty, revisions and the implications of related indicators, support comparison of options and identify areas where implementation is falling short, without advocating a particular political choice. Statistical literacy should be developed as a long-term capability, through curricula and continuous engagement with public officials, journalists, researchers and citizens. Greater use of statistics can, in turn, strengthen accountability and reinforce the case for adequate financing.

B. Translating African development priorities into coherent statistical frameworks

37. Agenda 2063, sub regional and national development plans, sectoral strategies and regional integration commitments should be translated into clear statistical requirements. For each priority, producers and users should determine what must be measured, for whom, at which geographical level, from which sources, at what frequency and for which decisions. It would be useful to develop a statistical taxonomy in which statisticians organize existing measures by concept and purpose, distinguish inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes and risks, and clarify overlaps, limitations and data gaps.

38. The first step should be for them to organize and reinterpret existing evidence, introducing new indicators only where a genuine gap persists. For example, in analyses of food systems, they should consider data on inputs, production, productivity, losses, storage, transport, prices, household income, nutrition, social protection and climate shocks. A similarly comprehensive approach should be taken for analyses of employment, regional value chains, health systems, climate resilience, migration and poverty reduction. Joint

consideration of related indicators may reveal structural bottlenecks before they adversely affect development outcomes.

39. A limited set of priority areas at the continental level should be used as guidance for the harmonization of methodological work, and countries should be allowed to adapt implementation to their circumstances. Regional or continental methodological laboratories should bring together national statistics offices, regional economic communities, universities, research institutions and partners to develop, test and document approaches for measuring informality, employment quality, informal cross-border trade, pastoral systems, local deprivation, governance, climate vulnerability and displacement. Validated experiences from countries in Africa should serve as guidance for the development of global standards, with comparability being preserved and relevance and national ownership strengthened.

C. Building integrated, inclusive and trusted statistical ecosystems

40. Countries should link information from censuses and household and enterprise surveys with civil registration records, administrative data, tax and customs data, education and health information systems, geospatial information and other appropriate sources. Integration requires common classifications, interoperable formats, identifiers where legally appropriate, shared metadata and secure protocols for linking data. Better reuse of existing data can help to reduce duplication, improve timeliness and support analysis across institutional boundaries.

41. Data-collection protocols should be adapted to include populations and territories that are at risk of being excluded. Data should be disaggregated, where relevant and statistically feasible, by sex and gender, age, disability, income, geographical location, migration or displacement status and other nationally relevant characteristics. Small-area estimation, geospatial tools, adapted surveys and partnerships with local and humanitarian organizations can help to improve coverage in fragile settings. Such work must be in keeping with confidentiality, informed risk assessment and do-no-harm safeguards.

42. Modernization also depends on access to data and public trust. Public release calendars should be used routinely by institutions and each statistical release should contain an indication as to its source, reference period, concepts, coverage, revision status and type of values recorded (observed or modelled). Open data platforms, downloadable data sets, metadata catalogues, application programming interfaces and controlled microdata access tools should make non-confidential statistics easier to find and reuse. Quality frameworks should contain an indication as to when administrative, private sector, digital or model-based data may be used in official statistics and require transparent documentation of assumptions and limitations.

D. Reaffirming the role of national statistics offices as coordinators and stewards

43. As entities involved in the production of official statistics and data are becoming more diverse, national statistics offices do not need to produce every official statistic or control every data source. Their responsibility as coordinators and stewards is to ensure that official statistics produced across government and by authorized institutions are coherent, comparable, reliable, accessible and aligned with national priorities. This includes coordinating standards, classifications, metadata, quality assurance, dissemination and secure data-sharing arrangements and bringing partners together around nationally defined programmes.

44. Stewardship requires a proactive institutional approach, supported by effective legal arrangements. National statistics offices should advise on laws, regulations and administrative changes that affect professional independence, confidentiality, impartiality, coordination and data access. They should lead capacity development across national statistical systems and collaborate with universities, education authorities and professional bodies to strengthen skills and career development. Professional independence remains essential: official statisticians should explain evidence, uncertainty and trade-offs without becoming political actors.

E. Establishing sustainable, nationally owned and accountable financing mechanisms

45. Countries should make the transition from irregular project financing towards predictable domestic financing for the whole national statistical system. No single financing instrument is appropriate in every country. Dedicated statistical funds can help where they are well governed and integrated into the budget process, but they cannot be substitutes for clear priorities, demonstrated policy demand and regular use of statistics. In medium-term plans, a distinction should be made between funded and unfunded activities, recurrent and capital costs, and domestic and external contributions.

46. In its decision EX.CL/987(XXXII) of 26 January 2018,⁶ the Executive Council of the African Union requested States members of the Union to allocate 0.15 per cent of their national budgets to finance statistics. That continental benchmark cannot, however, be compared consistently across countries without a standardized methodology. The numerator, denominator and institutional boundaries should be defined and it should be indicated whether the benchmark applies only to the national statistics office or to the entire national statistical system and how salaries, censuses, surveys, administrative data, information technology, infrastructure and externally financed operations are treated. Common classifications, templates, documentation and validation rules are essential for meaningful comparison.

47. Development partners should align their financial and technical support with national statistical strategies, annual programmes and common standards. Activities, amounts, periods, recipient institutions, expected results and funding status should be identified in country-level commitments; duplication, unfunded priorities and projects that do not provide for a transition to domestic financing should be identified in joint reviews. Producers of statistics should also monitor the cost and performance of major outputs while protecting quality. Predictable domestic financing, partner support aligned with national priorities, demonstrated use of statistics, professional capacity and transparent accountability can together help to break the cycle of low use, weak demand and underfunding.

48. These priorities should be implemented together as they are mutually reinforcing. Leadership in the development of methodologies makes priority measures more relevant; implementation of statistical frameworks improves coherence; integrated statistical ecosystems make production more efficient; inclusive methods improve representation; effective stewardship helps to protect quality and trust; products designed for policymakers can encourage use; and predictable financing sustains delivery. The objective is to build mature national statistical systems that combine data from core and complementary sources securely and produce evidence that decision-makers

⁶ African Union, Executive Council, "Decision on the Reports of the Specialized Technical Committees (STCs)", EX.CL/Dec.987(XXXII) Rev.1, 26 January 2018, para. 41(i). Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/33909-ex_cl_decisions_986-1007_e.pdf.

can understand and use, and also ensure that institutions can be held accountable.

VI. Strategic recommendations, mechanisms for implementation and accountability

49. The Statistical Commission for Africa may wish to organize implementation around eight practical priorities: making the transition from passive use of global standards to African leadership in the development of methodologies; from isolated indicators to coherent priority taxonomies and development mechanisms; from publication to policy intelligence and statistical literacy; from irregularly available to predictable and accessible releases; from partial coverage to inclusive measurement; from fragmented data production systems to integrated and trusted data ecosystems; from broad coordination mandates to operational stewardship; and from short-term project financing to sustainable and accountable financing. For each priority, the responsible institution, time frame, expected outputs and indicators for monitoring progress should be specified.

50. Three mechanisms for implementation could be considered. Under the first, the current model would be maintained but improved. This approach is feasible and necessary for strengthening core operations, but it would not solve the problems of institutional fragmentation, limited use of statistics in policymaking or unsustainable financing. Under the second, efforts would be focused on selected gaps. This could produce visible results in areas such as informality, employment quality, food systems, climate vulnerability and regional integration, but could also lead to the creation of isolated pilot projects. Under the third, countries would build integrated statistical systems designed to meet information needs and address measurement gaps and their institutional causes. The third approach is preferred, provided that it is implemented in phases and adapted to national priorities and levels of statistical maturity. The proposed phases are set out in table 2.

Table 2

Proposed phases for the development of statistical systems that meet information needs and address measurement gaps and their institutional causes

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Members of ECA and national statistical systems</i>	<i>Regional and pan-African institutions and development partners</i>	<i>Expected output</i>
1 Assessment	Assess the level of maturity and user needs; map data sources; identify and cost funded and unfunded priorities; improve releases, metadata and access; and prepare policy briefs.	Provide assessment tools, peer learning and coordinated support based on national priorities.	Costed national road map and early improvements in access and use.
2 Testing	Pilot integrated statistical mechanisms in selected areas; establish data-sharing arrangements and inclusive methods; and develop user-oriented products.	Support methodological platforms, reusable standards, skills development and evaluation of pilot initiatives.	Tested methods and evidence of feasibility and usefulness.
3 Institutionalization	Embed successful approaches into strategies, annual programmes, budgets, regulations, sector systems and professional development.	Harmonize methods, mobilize financing aligned with national priorities and consolidate reporting and peer review.	Permanent national capacity and comparable progress at the continental level.

Source: Author's compilation.

51. Responsibilities should be clearly assigned. At the national level, members of ECA and their national statistics offices should lead assessment, prioritization, stewardship, production and national reporting efforts. Sectoral ministries and other data holders should improve the sources of administrative data, implement quality plans and share data securely. The regional economic communities should harmonize subregional priorities and methods. The African Union Commission, ECA and the African Development Bank should provide continental guidance, methodological support, capacity development and consolidated monitoring. Development partners, universities and civil society organizations should contribute through financing aligned with national priorities, research and innovation needs and diverse user perspectives.

52. A continental accountability mechanism should be established to report to each biennial session of the Statistical Commission for Africa on a limited set of verifiable topics: implementation of national statistical strategies; timeliness and accessibility of priority releases; data disaggregation; integration of administrative and geospatial data; progress in selected priority domains; professional capacity; domestic and partner financing; and use of statistics in policymaking. It should also include a common methodology for measuring statistical financing, a matrix of partner commitments and peer learning based on documented country practices rather than unvalidated self-assessment.

53. These topics, which would apply across the continent, should be translated into a small number of actions at the national level and set out in national road maps. Initial actions can include publishing release calendars, improving metadata, reconciling major discrepancies between sources, opening access to existing data sets, costing unfunded priorities and producing policy briefs from available evidence. Later actions should include the institution of tested priority methodologies, functioning data-sharing arrangements, integrated sources of administrative and geospatial data, professional development systems and recurrent domestic budget lines. Implementation in this order can help to deliver early, visible improvements and to establish the institutional conditions needed for wider implementation.

54. The proposed approach is phased and deliberately limited in scope. It does not require that every country modernize every domain at once or that established instruments be replaced. The objective is to enable statisticians to make better use of existing data, test integrated approaches in a limited number of priority areas and incorporate only approaches that prove feasible and useful into regular systems and programmes. This approach is aligned with transformation and modernization guidance provided in the road map for the transformation and modernization of official statistics in Africa, 2023-2030.⁷ Progress indicators should be used to measure institutional change and the use of statistics in policymaking, not only the number of activities completed. Periodic reviews should allow priorities, methods and time frames to be adjusted when evidence shows that they are not producing the intended results. The objective is to also make the transition from project-based interventions to permanent national capacity development, and from declarations of intent to traceable action.

VII. Points for consideration by the Statistical Commission for Africa

55. The proposed points for consideration are intended to establish a common direction while allowing countries flexibility in setting their priorities

⁷ Economic Commission for Africa, Subregional Office for Eastern Africa, *Improving food security in Eastern Africa through greater intra-regional trade: a review of the issues* (Kigali, 2025). Available at <https://repository.uneca.org/entities/publication/86b1ef3e-9ad1-46f5-9834-981d770162f1>.

and sequencing the implementation of those priorities. They combine protection of core official statistics with stronger African leadership in the development of methodologies, better integration of ecosystems, sustainable financing, development partnerships aligned with national priorities and verifiable accountability. They are intended to guide national action, regional harmonization and partner support between sessions of the Commission, with clear responsibilities and follow-up arrangements. The Statistical Commission for Africa is invited:

(a) To take note of the partial alignment between development aspirations, observed structural conditions and lived experiences and available statistical evidence in Africa, and to recognize the role of statistics in connecting development aspirations with observed conditions;

(b) To reaffirm that modernization of statistical systems calls for strengthening, not replacement, of censuses, surveys, national accounts, civil registration and administrative statistics, protection of professional independence, integration of appropriate new data sources, and data production and analysis designed to support policymaking;

(c) To endorse the phased development of mature, integrated and development-oriented data ecosystems as the preferred mechanism for implementation;

(d) To invite members of ECA to identify a limited set of priority measurement domains and incorporate the corresponding statistical requirements, disaggregation and financing needs, and dissemination commitments into national statistical strategies and annual programmes;

(e) To invite the African Union Commission, with support from ECA, the African Development Bank, the regional economic communities and partners, to incorporate the strategic directions set out in the present document into the next phase of the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa;

(f) To request the African Union Commission, ECA and the African Development Bank, working with members of ECA and the regional economic communities, to develop common methodological guidance for priority domains and a standardized methodology for monitoring the 0.15 per cent financing benchmark;

(g) To encourage members of ECA to strengthen the production of inclusive and disaggregated statistics relevant to national conditions, including, where appropriate, statistics disaggregated by sex and gender, age, disability, geographical location, income and migration or displacement status;

(h) To encourage members of ECA to give practical effect to the stewardship role of national statistics offices, including through functioning coordination mechanisms, secure data-sharing arrangements, quality assurance, professional capacity development and long-term statistical literacy;

(i) To invite development partners to align their financial and technical support with nationally owned priorities, common standards, annual and multi-annual statistics programmes and country-level commitment matrices; and

(j) To request ECA and partners to prepare a continental implementation road map, an accountability mechanism and a partner commitment matrix for consideration at the forthcoming session of the Statistical Commission for Africa.