

Novel Statistical Capacity Building Initiatives: Addis Ababa Plan of Action And Paris21¹

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Summary

The paper reviews and compares two novel initiatives for building statistical capacity in Africa - the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s and PARIS21. The two initiatives are shown to be complementary and to have the "right ingredients" required for building statistical capacity.

1. Introduction

The process of building capacity for statistical development in the bulk of developing countries has a short history, some 40 years or so. In Africa, the process started in earnest after independence in mid-1960s when demand for statistics to inform national development planning processes became apparent. The process was given impetus by a number of global and regional initiatives on statistics such as the World Fertility Survey, Household Survey Capability Programme, etc. In spite of the many years of investment in statistical production supported by donors and international organizations, the role and importance of statistics in the African region have by and large continued to receive low priority and the capacity to produce them has not been built in a sustainable manner. Characterization of statistical data in many African countries as being inaccurate, inconsistent, insufficiently disaggregated, etc. and the statistical systems not being responsive to real user needs, is but familiar script. This paper reviews and compares two major initiatives for building capacity for statistical development in Africa - one established at the beginning and the other at the end of the 1990s. The two initiatives are shown to be complementary and to have the "**right ingredients**" required for building statistical capacity in the African region.

2. Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s (AAPA)

Beginning from late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, there was general decline in statistical production in Africa on account of poor economic performance and the low priority Governments in the countries placed on statistical production. This decline became a major concern to both national governments and development partners. To reverse it and to revitalize statistical production, the 16th Meeting of African Ministers responsible for economic planning and development adopted the **Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s (AAPA)**. AAPA was formulated following a detailed assessment of national statistical capacities undertaken in 32 African countries. The assessment identified the following as some of the main factors constraining statistical production in Africa: poor management of statistical offices, inadequate funding, lack of timeliness in delivering outputs, unsatisfactory quality of data produced, and inability to respond quickly to new data needs. It is significant to note that AAPA is a "home grown" initiative that takes into account the African condition and realities.

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The objectives of the AAPA were to [1]: achieve national self-sufficiency in statistical production, including the creation of a comprehensive national statistical database by the end of the century; improve the reliability and relevance of data produced in African countries; undertake production of data required for formulating, monitoring and evaluating programmes designed to restructure and transform African economies; improve the timeliness in the production and dissemination of statistical information; increase awareness of the importance of statistical information among users; strengthen and sustain statistical training programmes at various levels and institutions; promote contact and dialogue amongst African statisticians; encourage improvement in the organisational set-up of the National Statistical System and assure their autonomy; and improve co-ordination of all statistical development programmes at both national and inter-national levels.

To facilitate the implementation of AAPA, an inter-agency group, the **Co-ordinating Committee on African Statistical Development (CASD)** was established comprising representatives of directors of national statistical offices, regional training centres, African and non-African bilateral and multilateral agencies. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) provided the Secretariat. CASD was to review overall progress in implementation of the AAPA, facilitate continuous exchange of information, etc. It established Task Forces to address specific and time-bound tasks.

The AAPA provided a basis for reversing the decline in statistical production and for building national statistical systems. Through ECAs regular programme and regional technical assistance programmes supported by bilateral and multilateral co-operation agencies, some progress in statistical development was made in some countries. Some awareness was created through Africa Statistics Day (18 November) celebrations. However, the implementation of AAPA was not as successful as it could have been for a number of reasons, among them: (a) AAPA was not well resourced, (b) it was also not well popularised among African countries, (c) AAPA did not make full use of existing structures and especially the sub-regional organizations, (d) restructuring may have affected ECA's effectiveness in playing its role, etc. Statistical development in Africa in the context of AAPA is currently being evaluated. It is expected that following the evaluation, there will be a follow-up plan that will provide new strategic directions for statistical development in Africa, taking into account new challenges as well as opportunities created by the realized need among development partners for increased co-ordination and collaboration, and advances in communication and information technologies.

2. PARIS21 Initiative

PARIS21 which stands for Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century was established in November 1999 at a Senior Expert Meeting held in Paris and sponsored by four international bodies, namely, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), United Nations (UN), The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and European Commission (EC).

The PARIS21 initiative in many ways draws inspiration from and builds on foundations laid by the AAPA. The objectives of PARIS21 include: putting countries in control of country-owned statistical systems with senior level support; serving key policy areas through priority setting and steering processes; improving statistical information and resources by addressing the required data needs such as data mining and analysis; effective co-ordination and support of both national and international resources; and putting in place sequenced information strategy by taking into account the existing capacities, resource constraints and other needs such as professional standards and the need for legislation [2].

Although PARIS21 is still in the process of formation, it has already taken on some interesting features which include the following, among others:

- **Ownership**

PARIS21 consortium is owned by over 300 members who include policy makers and statisticians, international organizations, professional bodies and academic institutions from both donor and developing countries. All members have equal voice. Developing countries thus have a stake in the PARIS21 process and have been able to pronounce themselves and contribute to the definition of the mission of the Initiative and the direction it should take.

- **Neutrality**

PARIS21 is neutral in the sense that it is not formally attached to an international organization, a single donor agency or developing country. This makes the initiative an **'honest broker'** in efforts to build capacity.

- **The PARIS21 Arrangement**

PARIS21 is not a permanent initiative and has avoided bureaucratic governance. The Initiative has a small Secretariat based at OECD in Paris and relies on effective co-ordination and collaboration with members (both from developing and developed world) to fulfil its mission.

- **Strategies**

PARIS21 works through: **partnerships** by bringing together donors and Governments in support of country-owned development strategies; **advocacy** by demonstrating the power of and use of statistics for policy decisions; **resources** by assisting to mobilise both national and international resources to enable collection of right information for policy making and especially for informing anti-poverty strategies and programmes; **information** by providing a platform for open debate, sharing of knowledge and for fostering co-ordination; and **strategies** by assisting countries to develop well-managed, resourced and sustainable statistical capacity, and by better use of data as a tool for more effective development.

3. Comparison of AAPA and PARIS21

Similarities

The two initiatives have a lot in common. a) Both initiatives were established to support major concerns. AAPA was established to support the Lagos Plan of Action - an economic blue print for African economic and social development, PARIS21 started out of a concern to reduce poverty in developing and especially highly indebted countries. b) Both initiatives emphasize capacity building, increasing awareness among users, making better use of available resources, effective donor

coordination and building sustainable information systems. c) They both do substantive work through task teams. c) The two initiatives are complementary.

Dissimilarities

a) The AAPA was based on detailed assessment of national statistical capacities in 32 countries. No such assessment preceded the PARIS21 initiative. b) The AAPA was time-bound - for the decade of the 1990s. Although it is generally agreed that the PARIS21 initiative should not become permanent, consensus has not yet emerged as to the life-span of the initiative. c) The AAPA did not provide a mechanism for its publicity and popularization to confer ownership of the Plan on countries. On the other hand, PARIS21 has put a lot of emphasis on making countries own the Initiative. This has been actualized by rolling the PARIS21 process to regions and in due course, to countries. d) At the time the AAPA was designed, communication and technology were a limiting factor in information sharing. The PARIS21 initiative came into being on the lap of a communication and information revolution. e) Except perhaps for the needs assessment and to some extent the Implementation Strategy, the AAPA indicated what needed to be done and not so much how to do it. On the other hand, PARIS21 is developing the tools for doing a number of things. For instance, while AAPA advocated creation of awareness about the importance of statistics, PARIS21 is developing products and tools that will be adapted to country needs for statistical advocacy.

References

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