AFRICAN STATISTICS DAY NOVEMBER 18, 2020

MODERNIZING NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS TO PROVIDE DATA AND STATISTICS TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

African Statistics Day is an annual event celebrated on 18 November to raise public awareness of the importance of statistics in all aspects of social and economic life. The theme this year is "Modernizing national statistical systems to provide data and statistics to support sustainable peace and development in Africa", which is in tandem with the theme of the African Union for the year 2020, "Silencing the guns: Creating conducive conditions for Africa's development". The theme for African Statistics Day in 2020 was chosen to raise awareness among decision-makers, technical and financial partners, data producers, researchers and the general public about the critical importance of governance and socioeconomic statistics in achieving the goal of a conflict-free Africa. Peace, security and socioeconomic development must be pursued simultaneously to make "silencing the guns" a reality across the continent.

Some notable facts

Most crises and violent conflicts in Africa are being driven by poverty, economic hardship, the violation or manipulation of constitutions, the violation of human rights, exclusion, inequality, marginalization, the mismanagement of Africa's rich ethnic diversity, relapses into cycles of violence in several post-conflict settings, and external interference in African affairs.[1] "Silencing the guns" requires solving the problems that are the root cause of the social instability that is giving rise to armed conflict.

In 2019, nearly 3,000 occurrences of armed conflict, including ethnic-based conflict, and State and non-State-based conflict, were registered across the continent.[2] Armed conflict has caused the death of thousands of people, most of whom were civilians (including women and children), and resulted in the forced displacement of populations, the disruption of economic activity, increased unemployment, loss of income, relapses into poverty, infrastructure destruction and widespread uncertainty. Such consequences sow the seeds of new conflicts, thereby creating a vicious circle. In 2019, 30 African countries were affected by armed conflict, compared to 25 the year before.

Building a peaceful Africa requires statistics and data

The contribution of statistics to peace goes beyond counting the sorrows caused by conflict. Statistics can be used to create the conditions that are conductive to Africa's development, as explained below.

Governance statistics are fundamental to ensuring that the relationship between the State and its people is inclusive, transparent and accountable.[4] They assist in monitoring the performance of government, in better understanding the contribution of governance in its various dimensions to development, and in ensuring that policy-making is evidence-based. Governance statistics contribute to the measurement and realization of human rights. They can help to identify groups or subgroups in the population that are most affected by dysfunction in governance systems, with a view to putting in place appropriately targeted policies so as to leave no one behind.

Governance, peace and security statistics can also contribute to the prevention and management of conflict and violence. When used as early-warning systems, they can help to foster peace by regularly providing information on the status of State-society relations, which lie at the centre of sustainable peace. Available data indicate that Africa is performing poorly across a range of governance, peace and security indicators, as compared to other regions of the world. By educating citizens in the use of data and statistics to inform the choices that they make, national statistical systems can enhance democratic debate in the country. Statistical literacy is therefore key to promoting good governance and to understanding what can be done to end war, civil conflict and gender-based violence.

Socioeconomic statistics are essential to understanding and using economic information for planning and policy design. Macroeconomic decision-making that is grounded in data and statistics offers the best path to ensuring strong economic growth and job creation, which will in turn lift more people out of poverty and increase their produ

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[1] African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020 (Lusaka Master Roadmap 2016). Available at https://au.int/en/documents/20200204/african-union-master-roadmap-practical-steps-silence-guns-africa-year-2020-lusaka.

[2] Uppsala University and Peace Research Institute Oslo. Armed Conflict Dataset, accessed September 2020.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Pria Group on Governance Statistics. "Handbook on governance statistics". Available at http://ine.cv/praiagroup.

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Socioeconomic statistics also help to capture the impact of digitalization and globalization on production, consumption, employment, investment and financial flows. They go beyond gross domestic product to include broader measures of inequality (income, consumption, wealth and opportunity) and more subjective measures of well-being, such as life satisfaction and levels of trust.

Modernization is needed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have a severely negative impact on the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063, by reversing the gains achieved in a number of areas and exacerbating already high levels of inequality within and among countries. The pandemic has revealed weaknesses in many systems, including the limitations of traditional methods of collecting data and statistics. Governments have implemented various strategies to contain the pandemic, which have, in many cases, significantly affected the timely collection of the data and statistics required to inform decision-making. According to a report released by the Economic Commission for Africa in March 2020, 25 per cent of planned surveys had been halted or suspended and an additional 29 per cent had been postponed. Even where operations were ongoing, higher non-responses rates and low sample coverage were observed. Furthermore, 22 per cent of population and housing census activities had been either halted or suspended.

National statistical systems, in particular national statistics offices, have been overwhelmed by requests for data, statistical services and information. They must modernize by using new technologies and new data sources to maximize efficiency, so as to provide the data and statistics that are necessary to support sustainable development and peaceful coexistence in Africa. Working closely with all stakeholders, they are encouraged to incorporate SHaSA[5] modules on governance, peace and security into existing surveys to produce

regular statistics in those areas. Doing so is now more urgent than ever given the central thrust of Agenda 2063 of building a peaceful, stable, secure, integrated and prosperous Africa, and the emphasis of the 2030 Agenda on leaving no one behind.

Data and statistics are thus central to achieving a conflict-free Africa; preventing genocide; making peace a reality for all; ridding the continent of war, violent conflict and human rights violations; and supporting the ambition not to pass the burden of conflict to future generations.

More funding is required for statistical activities

According to a 2020 report on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and data availability in Africa,[6] the continent has regressed overall in respect of Goal 16, which concerns peace, justice and strong institutions. It was also noted that few countries had sufficient data to proceed with in-depth analyses of progress. Moreover, there were no data on many of the related indicators for African countries. Among the main reasons for not regularly producing such statistics at the national level were a lack of funding (which has a negative impact on the timely production of official statistics, including those related to sustainable peace and development), a low level of political support for the production of governance statistics, and inadequate institutional capacity and accountability.

More sustainable public funding should be allocated to national statistical systems in Africa for the regular production of core statistics relating to sustainable peace and development, with a view to keeping society and government well informed in that regard. All actors, including those in government and civil society, are invited to undertake data-driven analyses of peace and development in Africa, thereby making better use of relevant existing data and statistics. Partners are invited to continue supporting countries in regularly producing statistics on core peace and development indicators.

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[5] Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa.
[6] Economic Commission for Africa, "2020 Africa SDG progress and data availability report: Is Africa on track to meet the SDGs?" (unpublished report).

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