



**Keynote Address
by
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and
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**for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing
Countries
and Small Island Developing States**

**at the opening session
“Global issues that require global solutions”
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**Annual Meeting of the
Partnership in Statistics for Development
in the 21st Century (PARIS21)**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both my great honour and pleasure to be with you and share some thoughts.

In the last few weeks, not a day has gone by without us seeing a new scandal hitting the headlines related to data safety, information privacy or manipulation.

I think all of us here may have spent a moment thinking about how much information we really want to put out there now that it is clear that we are faced with critical issues in how data and information are used!

In the last couple years, we have seen how data and information circulate and are used ever more rapidly through the host of distributional networks available. Data and information that often cannot be verified for a host of reasons.

It is both an understatement and a platitude to say that we live in a rapidly changing world.

The world has always changed. That is not new. And throughout history policy responses always had to be found. What may be the challenge of our times is the extreme speed of change.

This speed has been made possible with the advent and ever more rapidly evolving technological advances we witness which, in turn, change social, economic and political behaviours.

But these are also technological advances some enjoy and others do not participate in - as I just said at a mobile learning meeting in Paris last week: technology bears the risk to create yet another big gap - the gap between the have and have nots in technology!

It is now up to us to see whether this rapid change affecting all of us is solely risk or how our policy responses turn technological advances into opportunities for ALL.

Clearly, these days we not only need to manage massive data amounts - and that is a challenge in itself regarding people's data literacy skills - but this unprecedented increase in the amount of information deeply challenges our ways of verification, analysis and interpretation of data and information.

Long gone are the times of the monopoly of data and information for decision-making of official statistics offices.

And yet, verified, verifiable and timely and relevant data and information are more than ever needed for policy design and decision-making.

So, the question before us is:

how do we ensure that relevant, verifiable official statistics and data are available in real time to decision-makers and the broader public in user-friendly ways?

We always must keep in mind that data or information are not an end in and of themselves but a strategic tool for advancing development.

We need to find practical and actionable answers to this dilemma including to the major challenge of SPEEDY availability of data and information. I fear time has run out to debate this theoretically!

Decisions have to be taken in real time because fact-based decision-making requires real time data.

This is a challenge common to all governments.

This challenge however is greatly amplified and much more critical for the 91 countries and over one billion people OHRLLS, my office, is a voice for.

It is a challenge that ranges from issues of technological infrastructure including broadband access to issues of skills to issues of building appropriate legislative frameworks keeping pace with the emerging issues we see for data privacy, digitization, data use, information sharing, and coordination.

The majority of the least developed countries, land-locked developing countries, small island developing states and other fragile countries over decades now had limited resources for and investment in statistical development.

So, at the starting block we already had a considerable gap.

These countries truly are at risk of being left behind. This makes them highly vulnerable to the risks of data and information distortions.

This high degree of vulnerability to information distortion bears serious potential for adverse impacts on societies and their development paths.

We now must ensure with urgency that the already existing divide does not grow more.

Most of the countries OHRLLS is a voice for have small statistical offices.

Offices lacking capacity and the resources to undertake vital statistical activities such as censuses and surveys.

Given funding constraints, countries cannot engage in regular data collection activities that would allow for time series in data for the continued monitoring of the status of the country's development and progress.

The need to strengthen and modernize national statistical infrastructure and systems is urgent.

It is urgent because otherwise policy-making, planning and monitoring operate in a data vacuum and will be far from evidence-based.

Agenda 2030 recognises this and so do the three Programmes of Action which my Office is responsible for monitoring – the Istanbul Programme of Action for the LDCs, the Vienna Programme of Action for the LLDCs and the SAMOA Pathway for the SIDS.

These agreed -on action frameworks all are also meant to be drivers for generating high-quality data so we can actually measure how we progress against globally agreed on goals.

But, is this happening universally? Is everybody included?

These agreements were and are meant to generate positive impacts for data and statistics development for ALL.

There has been undeniable progress in some basic areas.

Let me share an example of a successful impact.

Under the Istanbul Programme of Action for LDCs internet access is a key goal.

As I said earlier, and while we talk about big-data and all sorts of data issues and revolutions, many offices in LDCs continue to struggle with basics like reliable and fast internet access!

From 2011 to 2016, Internet penetration in LDCs reached almost 16% compared to 5% in 2011. Mobile-broadband penetration increased to about one fifth of populations in 2017.

Now, pessimism is not an answer and I want to see the glass half full here.

There is progress, and that shows that progress is possible but it remains very slow.

This for an example on a basic aspect that I call the need for investment in up-to-date “ hardware “.

As we all know, your most sophisticated PC is of no use if you do not know how to operate it.

There is the equally urgent need for enhanced capacity investment in competencies and skills ensuring that developing nations are not left behind in data literacy, skilled people but also systems , including legal frameworks, ensuring the supply of timely, reliable, relevant and cybersecurity protected data.

This is what we must get done.

I certainly do see PARIS21 play a major role in this.

PARIS21 has demonstrated great engagement over the past three years with over 100 countries and your establishing partnerships with a significant number of global, regional and national organizations and institutions is a step in the right direction.

There indeed is great advantage to working through a global initiative such as PARIS21 to modernize and strengthen statistical systems given your decades-long and vast regional and country experiences.

I certainly witnessed this just recently at the UN Statistics Commission session in New York through the PARIS21’s initiative to bring together the statistical agenda of the SIDS regions. Paris21 ensured that their specificities and unique challenges are adequately addressed within the UN framework.

I have no doubt that this important initiative will greatly contribute to strengthen regional statistics cooperation, through skill sharing, exchange of experience and best practice. The initiative will also generate economies of scale and that is a very important feature for countries in the SIDS region.

As your Champion for Statistical Development, I look forward to working closely with PARIS21. Let us scale up our support to the modernization and upgrading of statistical institutions and capacity at all levels, particularly in developing countries.

Let us show strong leadership.

We must focus on addressing institutional constraints and skill gaps in statistics.

We must accelerate what we do because there is no time to be lost - 2030 is around the corner!

And there also is a need for increased investment in statistics development-domestic and international investment.

In 2015, only 0.3% of Official Development Assistance was dedicated towards data and statistics. In this regard, the Global Fund on Development Data that PARIS21 will scope out this year holds great promise.

PARIS21's focus on the importance of reliable, relevant and timely statistics for governance, policy-making and thus our ultimate goal of sustainable development for all deserves to become even stronger!

We must notch up our communication in this regard and strengthen collaboration among data players and stakeholders.

Agenda 2030 aims to leave no one behind - so let us ensure that the 91 countries, grouped as least developed countries, the land-locked developing countries and the small island developing states will not be left behind in this critical area of work we will discuss at our meeting.

Thank you.
