

**Fragile states and Statistics what can and should be done:  
Experiences from the African continent**

**PARIS21 Steering Committee  
Paris  
5-7 November 2008**

**Pali Lehohla**

**Statistician-General South Africa**

Co-Chair of PARIS21

Chair of the United Nations Statistics Commission 2008 to 2009

Chair of Statistics Commission Africa

Chair of African Symposia for Statistical Development

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Seeds of Fragility**
- 3. Political Strife and statistics**
- 4. Economy, politics and statistics (The political economy of statistics)**
- 5. Post 1995 statistical development in Africa**
- 6.0 Continental experience**
  - 6.1 Southern Africa**
  - 6.2 East Africa**
  - 6.3 West Africa**
  - 6.4 North Africa**
- 7.0 Sudan**
- 8.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

## 1. Introduction

In the last three hundred years the world has seen the growing importance of information. The momentum was significantly gained in the last twenty five years. The basic information used for decision making in jurisdictions has been the one derived from the census of the population. Records show that the practice of undertaking a census predates the birth of Jesus Christ in China. However, present day censuses started taking their shape in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some countries such as the Scandinavians adopted registers as the basis for collation of information. As a consequence of this long history of managing administrative records, they have developed a very sophisticated information base that increasingly replaced the traditional census in their jurisdiction. They use administrative records. Debates of late are whether it is not better to move towards administrative records, especially given the extent of expense associated with traditional census undertakings.

Whilst there have been these advancements in parts of the world, the irony is that in the South, especially in Africa, censuses are very rare in comparison to the rest of the world. Whilst upon independence African countries managed to undertake one or the other form of a population census, by the 70's and the 80's the practice of decennial censuses was confined to very few countries.

There is also evidence that countries that have built good information systems have also managed technological and industrial development better than those that have not. And in the context of globalization, it appears that information has become a *sine qua non* for peace, better terms of trade, improving incomes, longevity and higher living standards. This paper attempts to define the place of statistics in development and asserts that statistics is a catalyst for peace and development and suggests that to the extent that countries are not enlightened through information, human progress is less likely to take root. In the end using observations from several countries that were and are in conflict, the paper advocates for the production and utilization of statistics as one of the important tenets for progress. The paper draws case studies from Africa.

## 2. Seeds of Fragility

Post-colonial Africa went through a tumultuous phase of development. In this regard there is no doubt that this period had immense negative implications for the development of systems of accountability, especially statistics. Post-colonial Africa was birthed into a polarised world, the Cold-War. The birth attendant delivering Africa was either overtly or covertly inclined towards the East or the West. In this period of the arms race and world of super powers, the world was dominated by the west as led by the United States of America or the East as led by the USSR. This political dichotomy defined to a large extent the political determination and course that the majority of African countries would follow upon independence. As a consequence of this super power polarity and internal African strife, the politics of Africa were chequered by coups and counter coups, violence, bloodshed and instability. With the exception of those countries that got

independence in the seventies, eighties and nineties namely, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa; an overwhelming majority of post-colonial African countries, suffered regime change through the barrel of the gun. Botswana remains an exception to this kind of generalisation. When the eighties came to a close, the Berlin wall collapsed, and this gave way to a uni-polar world dominated by the United States of America because it remained as the only super power. Accompanying these changes in the balance of forces, were large scale global movements that promoted the pre-eminence of multilateralism, development agenda and sought more transparency and democracy. The Human Development Index was born, so were the Millennium Development Goals subsequently, Climate change and Global Warming came to be important global agenda issues, World Summit for Sustainable Development became yet another global consideration. During this period of promoting multilateralism, South Africa notably finally won its liberation through political negotiations in 1994 and several African countries went through elections and promoted parliamentary democracies. The nineties ushered a new and different wave of political modes of existence vis-à-vis the militaristic and violent formations that existed in the sixties, seventies and eighties in Africa. Forms of government, dramatically influences the community of practice in official statistics. With the emergence of peace and democracy, there was also evidence that statistical practice was enabled. Those in power and in opposition soon realised that they as leadership and their respective followers, require a mechanism for holding one another to account. In military or dictatorial regimes, statistics may not and could not thrive because they are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for decision making. Competence in official statistics had been built in countries such as Kenya which was also already building competence in geography in the eighties. Uganda was also assisted by the existence of the Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (ISAE) where a good number of staff members in official statistics on and for the continent were trained. But with the advent of political turmoil of the seventies, Uganda had the cream of its professionals fleeing the country and subsequently there was very little statistics to talk of by the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties. South Africa troubled by apartheid, did not have a comprehensive statistical programme, although it covered economic statistics for an increasingly strong economy. By 1994, the system of statistics in South Africa had lost all credibility and this was driven by the disdain for apartheid and the fact that the political practice undermined fundamental principles of official statistics.

Towards the end of the sixties as Africa concluded her decolonisation, she was showing an enormous appetite for statistical development and this became evident through the seventies and eighties. In this time Africa immersed herself in shaping systems of statistics domestically and successfully brought some influence internationally. The statistical agenda of Africa was characterised by an attempt by African countries to manage their first post colonial censuses. However, at the same time, in particular until the close of the eighties, Africa was also indulging in unprecedented political strife marked by coups and counter coups. The temporal story of Africa is that the statistical waves were marked by a rise, demise and a rise. The years of dramatic manifestation of these changes were 1965 to 1985, 1985 to 1997 and 1998 to the present time respectively. The two decades spanning 1965 to 1985 saw a collective of initiatives aimed at the

establishment of statistical infrastructure on the continent. The building of statistical infrastructure consisted of establishing the post colonial statistics office and some regulatory basis for the existence of the organisation, the establishment of regional training institutes for the newly independent states, the creation and management of a work programme and the establishment of regional competence to support statistical development. The second wave consists of the destruction of the statistical infrastructure and, in significant instances leading to its total decay at country and regional level. The third period of the late nineties and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century consists of Africa making rapid gains in the revival and implementation of more sustainable strategies to statistical development.

The establishment of statistical infrastructure in Africa appears to have focused on four important pillars. Firstly it was the establishment of the statistics offices, second the establishment of the training institutions that would supply the requisite manpower for these offices, third a work programme which these offices had to execute and fourth a statistical infrastructure at the continental level to support country initiatives. However, these declined in the two decades of the 70's and 80's.

### **3. Political Strife and statistics**

Globally, nowhere has the coexistence of conflict, war, human rights abuse and lack of or absence of statistics, been as manifest as has been in Africa. The correlation appears to be so strong that it suggests some levels of causality that would merit scientific enquiry. The question that this brings up in Africa is whether statistical development can survive in times of conflict? Or given that statistics thrive in democracies, can they play a catalytic role towards creating democracies or are they idle beneficiaries of democracy? If the latter is true then statistics should bask in the euphoria of the interest that has been thrust upon the institution, and enjoy the warmth whilst it lasts until the painful fate settles in. If this assumption is not true, the question is what strategies driven largely by professional interest should statisticians immerse themselves in, in defence of democracy and at the same time the institution statistics itself? What is the role of the fundamental principles of official statistics and legislation in the practice of official statistics? Further the question is why now are the signs suggesting that statistics will thrive and what needs to be done to engage a path that will be almost impossible to reverse? How do statistician and the body polity of users lock-in value in perpetuity?

### **4. Economy, politics and statistics (The political economy of statistics)**

We have seen that immediately after independence the necessary institutions for statistical development on the continent were put in place. What is also clear is that during that period of close to thirty years, military coups and dictatorships were the order of the day on the African political scene. Furthermore dismal economic performance sat side by side with this untenable political situation. Both the social and economic conditions on the continent were becoming worse and service delivery was rapidly declining. Price controls and barriers to trade led to shortages of goods and services and these induced inflationary pressures and citizens continued to suffer dramatic declines in

their standard of living. So despite the statistical institutions being put in place, the training institutes being established and a work programme being implemented, the political and economic developments completely overwhelmed and undermined statistical institutions. Statistics did not appear to be useful or contribute significantly in the arena of decision making. They became supply driven goods without a corresponding eager market demanding to make use of such products and services. For instance, in the case of Kenya, the Census of the decade of the 90's became a subject of political ridicule whilst the results of the Census from Nigeria were not accepted until eight years later, only in 1998. Of what value would a census accepted so late be to decision making both in Nigeria and Kenya? In South Africa, as a consequence of its chequered apartheid past, the results of its partial census of 1991 could not be relied upon for the course of development action of the new government which was ushered in 1994. South Africa has continued to find difficulty in building trust in official statistics as a consequence of this challenging legacy. The statistics terrain is characterised by fragmentation and production processes that are less organised. However, over time these problems are being addressed as will be elaborated upon in the paragraphs that focus on South Africa.

Shortly after independence, Africa was destabilised politically. Fervent attempts at statistical development sat side by side with successful coups de tat and regime changes. This resulted in a situation where the gains that Africa began with during the rising wave of statistical development in the ten years from mid point of the sixties getting lost as Africa soon presided over systems that undermined this positive development and over time, the system had been so weakened that the decay in statistical infrastructure became very rapid. This was especially so during the period from around 1985 to 1995. By 1997, some statistical practices, offices and infrastructure were decadent and in total disarray.

## **5. Post 1995 statistical development in Africa**

At the beginning of the decade of the nineties, the Addis Ababa Plan of Action embraced the development of statistics as a core ingredient for Africa's development. Although sadly abandoned then and left to gather dust, this plan of action for statistical development has been resuscitated as a blue print for guiding statistical development on the continent.

The post '95 statistical development in Africa can be traced and correlated with the political stability that emerged from the conflict of the seventies and eighties and the frequency with which democratic governments were elected to power. The conditions of peace gave rise to the demand for statistics. In fact on the continent a key output of statistics, namely a census of the population, has become a pre-condition for a democratic election.

By 2001, worried about the soaring cost of undertaking a census, jointly with UNFPA, UNSD and PARIS21, Statistics South Africa hosted a conference on reducing the costs of a census. This well attended conference was followed by another conference in 2003 focusing on making value visible. This was also held by Statistics South Africa. The

agenda for ensuring that Africa counts was emerging and the stage was set for contributing significantly in the system of global statistics one surmised. However, faced with the reality of objective contribution and dogged by difficulties of participating and being an integral part of the global system of statistics, Africa could not pronounce on the Principles and Recommendations of the 2010 Round of Housing and Population Census. This was despite the fact that the post 1995 period has demonstrated that it holds promise for Africa. Another difficulty that became apparent was how Africa fared with the implementation of measurement of progress and providing reports on achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The Friends of the Chair prepared a report for the Chair of the UNSC and requested that the matter be raised at the UN General Assembly in order that statistical problems of Africa can be attended to in a more aggressive manner than hitherto.

Following a stakeholder meeting in Younde, Cameroun for raising awareness for the 2010 Round of Censuses and against the backdrop that Africa had no plans for contributing in the Principles and Recommendations of the 2010 Round of Housing and Population Censuses, it became important that Africa address these matters. Statistics South Africa was asked by countries to convene a meeting and address the issues of Principles and Recommendations for the 2010 Round of Censuses. The session was successfully convened and subsequently a decision was made that countries will take turns in hosting what then became the African Symposium for Statistical Development (ASSD). This will be a fifty three year journey, with an African country hosting each year. The first few years of the ASSD will focus on censuses and ensure that assistance is provided for countries emerging out of conflict as well as highlighting the peace mission of censuses. Thus far three such ASSDs have been held in Cape Town - South Africa, Kigali - Rwanda and Accra - Ghana. The fourth ASSD is aimed for Luanda - Angola in January 2009. The ASSD is a country led programme that deals with issues of content and advocacy, but more specifically ensuring that Africa gets counted in the 2010 Round of Censuses. Furthermore the commitment is to assist countries emerging out of conflict in taking a census in the 2010 Round. Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, Eritrea, Angola and the DRC are some of the countries on the continent on the priority list of the ASSD.

## **6.0 continental experience**

Below we outline some of the experiences of strife in the most troubled parts of the African continent and how the leadership of the continent strives to mitigate these problems and put in place measures to resolve some of the difficulties. We also make special attention to the most recent census experience under conditions of conflict and how that has gone thus far.

### **6.1 Southern Africa**

A number of states on the continent remain very fragile. In the South only Botswana had enjoyed at least four decades of uninterrupted development. South Africa is fifteen years out of apartheid and has conducted two post apartheid censuses and applied the results to manage governance. The country has had two successfully conducted elections.

Mozambique has seen rapid improvements in its participatory democracy through elections and statistical development including undertaking three post independent censuses. Tanzania and Zambia suffered years of destabilization from South Africa and with peace dawning in South Africa the degree of fragility subsided. The countries that show stress currently are Angola and the DRC and these have been joined by Zimbabwe. Both Angola and DRC have last had censuses more than 30 years ago and these are two richest countries in SADC. They have also conducted elections and there are firm and promising indications that both these countries will run a census in this 2010 round of population and housing censuses, with Angola scheduled for 2011.

## **6.2 East Africa**

In East Africa, Somalia and Eritrea have remained stress points regionally, and Kenya raised international eye-brows as it headed for a failed resolution for an election. This interrupted preparations for a census and it is likely that the census will be postponed by up to a year. A census in Somalia is less likely to be held.

## **6.3 West Africa**

In West Africa, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Chad and Liberia remained sore points, however. Both Liberia and Sierra Leone had had more than two decades without a census. Sierra Leone conducted one in the late 90s and this was followed by an election. Liberia managed to run their census this year following on the election.

## **6.4 North Africa**

Africa, North of the Sahara remains somewhat stable with West Sahara remaining a rather fragile part of the African Union.

## **7.0 Sudan**

A more interesting case is that of the Sudan, where conflict resolution was explicitly linked with a statistical operation, namely the census. In 1998, Cambodia took the same route of using the census as an explicit condition for managing peace. This approach has been quite illusive though for Afghanistan.

Conducting the 5<sup>th</sup> Population Census in the Sudan in April 2008 is part of the constitutional requirement for the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The Census was scheduled to start on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2008, but the Government of South Sudan decided to declare non-participation in the census unless their demands were met. These took all stakeholders by surprise. The Monitoring and Observation Committee including the international community had to muster all will to get the government of the South to get back on track. The census was postponed by a week.



From the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April Sudanese of all walks of life, religious persuasions, class, adults and children, men and women, boys and girls heeded the historic and all important call to enroll, stand up and be counted. An army of 60 000 enumerators steadily swept households across Sudan from that day and continued to do this arduous undertaking. The Census had the blessings of the first citizens of the Government of National Unity and the Government of the South.

The media gave extensive coverage for the census and provided very balanced view of how the census had progressed and where there were difficulties they kept the public informed and clarified a number of important issues regarding the undertaking.

Sudan through the Monitoring and Observation Committee (MOC) has had the benefit of inviting expertise from several countries monitoring the Sudan census, and these include from Africa: Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, Egypt, Mozambique, Algeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Nigeria. From the Middle East is Jordan, from Asia and Central Asia, we have Indonesia, Australia, India and Azerbedjan respectively and from Europe there is France and the Americas we have Canada.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Population of Sudan is very unique, because not ever have so many nations and international bodies participated in an endeavour such as the census as they have done in Sudan. Perhaps the way Sudan has taken the step towards peace will go down as pioneering and worth emulating by others.

The census in Sudan is set to be followed by a referendum and an election in 2009.

## **8.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

**Conclusion:** We have observed how the institutions of statistics decayed over time, primarily due to lack and absence of leadership and the concomitant political instability that characterised Africa during the period of colonial domination and in the post colonisation period. By the nineties, Africa's statistical development was in a sorry state both at country level and at the ECA in Addis Ababa. We have also observed that by the end of the nineties, we have also observed a very strong sub stream driven by democratisation of Africa and the demand for statistics. Secondly new desires for a better world order and better engagement with the United Nations Statistics Division and the United Nations Statistics Commission arose. These pleaded the case for Africa, through a multiplicity of programmes that are organised and sanctioned by the Commission, such as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, Development Account, SDDS, GDDS, ICP, PARIS21 and the implementation of the recommendations regarding measurement of Millennium Development Goals. As directed from Commission resolutions, these initiatives provided further impetus for statistical development. Whilst these initiatives at first glance did not hold immediate hope for statistical development generally, over time they have proved to become strong support structures for renewal and support for especially ailing systems of official statistics in Africa. An analysis across the last eight years does demonstrate that collectively these initiatives have placed Africa on a different and high trajectory in the development of

statistics. Africa has shown enthusiasm and appetite for measurement and this is a promising sign as it democratises. Its users have demanded better and relevant statistics. However, there are leadership lapses in these organisations and these can be ill-afforded and have to be watched carefully and remedied before damage is done. There have been encouraging south-south collaboration practices, especially under the auspices of the UNSD. The area of leadership is an important one and jointly with Statistics Canada, Africa has put up a programme aimed at remedying this problem. It is early days and the programme is yet to be initiated, observed and evaluated but it is one that should address the scourge of leadership in these institutions.

Africa however, still requires to do first things first. This, in the main means that Africa should focus on the content and by this I mean technical and professional content of official statistics rather than matters of form. Under the guidance of the UNSC, there is sufficient promise that Africa is going to turn the corner and have its systems of statistics play a critical contribution in the global system of statistics, especially when Africa is assisted in continuous attendance of the Commission. This is especially so because of the unique political, economic and social circumstances under which Africa finds its statistical expression as we alluded to the decolonisation environment in Africa. Africa was not wrong in focusing on the four pillars. These should remain the area of focus and in addition Africa should promote statistical leadership and culture in order to ensure that Africa creates sustainable systems of statistics on the continent. This will also require at the international level that Millennium Goal 8, of building partnerships, is pursued rigorously by all, including adhering to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The initiatives of PARIS21 have demonstrated that renewal is possible and it is good for statistics and it has been good, especially for developing countries as they worked on the agenda of reviving and servicing the fragile democracies that emerged and statistics have begun to make their mark. The aim should be to entrench statistical culture and evidence based policy making. When we succeed in that regard, then we will know that statistical practice in Africa has been consolidated and can exist as a useful contributor in perpetuity.

The Sudanese experience is one of the most refreshing and successful in undertaking a census in a politically divided country. It demonstrates that it can be done and requires courage, commitment and continuously mobilizing consensus and leaning on other African countries for support and solutions.

**Recommendation:** In this regard, it is encouraging that Africa has through the ASSD identified African countries under stress and focused the agenda on statistical development including the Sudan. For PARIS21 it will be desirable to continue to advocate and support statistical development with a key focus on fragile states, especially as identified by the pan-African institutions through their for a, such as the ECA, AfDB, AU, ACB and ASSD. PARIS21 should work on the Sudan experience and work towards advocating for such a process.