

**Fourth session of the Committee on Statistics
25 March 2015, Bangkok, Thailand**

**Opening statement delivered by Dr Anis Chowdhury, Director, ESCAP Statistics
Division, on behalf of Dr Shamshad Akhtar, Under-Secretary General of the United
Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP**

Your Excellency, Mr. Somboon Mekpaiboonwattana, Vice Minister of Information and Communication Technology of Thailand

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

I am delighted to welcome you to the fourth session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics. I am especially pleased to recognize participants from all five ESCAP subregions, with 144 delegates representing 32 member States. I warmly welcome also our partners from 18 international development organizations.

This meeting represents a milestone for a number of expert groups that have been working intensively since last time the Committee met, in December 2012. I and my staff feel blessed to be able to work on a continuous basis with so many dedicated statisticians from national statistical offices and international organizations.

My heartfelt congratulations for the achievements go to the Chairs, Co-chairs and members of these expert groups. A particular note of thanks goes to the members of the Bureau, who, under the leadership of Ms Carmelita Ericta and Ms. Lisa Bersales, have so effectively guided the inter-sessional work.

Data revolution

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

We meet this week at a critical juncture for the statistical profession. As the world strives to 'leave no one behind' in the post-2015 development agenda, a tall order has been placed on the statistical community.

The goals and targets of the new development agenda will not be realized without accurate, comprehensive and timely information to provide insight about the most disadvantaged, vulnerable people in our communities – so that effective policies can be tailored to meet their specific needs. And the effectiveness of these policies can be monitored.

The world is awash with data and yet we lack credible information about the poorest and most marginalized communities. A data revolution has been called for – to make data work more directly in support of development.

The theme of this fourth session of the Committee, “Statistics for Development”, is about the future direction of statistics development. It is about using data to create the information and knowledge required to deliver sustainable and inclusive development.

To realize the data revolution, national statistical systems must evolve from data collectors to information and knowledge creators and communicators; they must prove insight about an ever-expanding range of issues, to higher levels of disaggregation, and with greater frequency, precision and accuracy.

It is a tall order to place on national statistical systems that in some cases do not have the capacity to produce even the most basic statistics of the required quality. This capacity gap is set to widen with the continued digital-technological divide and disparities in human and financial resources among countries in the region. Many countries will be unable to reap the benefit of the data revolution if governments and development partners fail to mobilize resources and technical assistance.

The statistical community needs to do more to raise awareness among development partners, politicians and budget holders of the power of data and statistics to transform lives and societies. We need to highlight and quantify the investments needed to realize that potential and explain the opportunity costs of failing to do so.

The ultimate responsibility for development lies with the national governments. Mobilizing domestic resources for investing in statistics development has to be strengthened. But statistics, like all government services, will be constrained by the finite resources available. National statistical systems will need to find more innovative, efficient and effective ways to conduct their business.

Statistical institutions will need to work closely with new actors and providers such as data scientists, geospatial and IT specialists in academia and the private sector. It is necessary to find new ways to gather data, exploit new data sources, and develop new partnerships and new ways of working. This is the only way through which we can unlock new sources of information and unleash a true data revolution.

Reflecting the global development agenda in the regional statistical community

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It was in recognition of this pivotal time for statistics development that the secretariat in consultation with the Bureau of the Committee took the decision to convene an expert group meeting in preparation for this fourth session.

The expert meeting, held in December last year brought together 47 development experts and statisticians to take stock of the development agenda beyond 2015. The discussions focused on the implications for statistics development in the region and concluded with a number of recommendations on the strategic priorities for collaboration on statistics in Asia and the Pacific.

I am very pleased to note the extensive work and consultation conducted by the Bureau to develop these recommendations into 19 concrete proposals. The proposals collectively aim to maximise the impact and support provided by the Committee to the successful delivery of the development agenda beyond 2015. I look forward to learning the outcomes of your deliberations on the proposals.

The 19 proposals reflect on the work of the Committee going forward. As such they are anchored in the two ambitious goals that the Committee committed to in 2010 and reaffirmed in 2012:

- First, to ensure that, by 2020, “all countries in the region have the capacity to produce an agreed basic range of population, economic, social and environmental statistics”.
- And second, “to create a more adaptive and cost-effective information management environment for national statistical offices through stronger collaboration.”

This session will consider a comprehensive range of regional and global initiatives in the areas of economic statistics, population and social statistics, civil registration and vital statistics, environment statistics, disaster risk reduction statistics, gender statistics, agricultural and rural statistics and the modernization of statistical production and services.

The strategies, programmes, progress reports and other proposals put forward for the Committee’s consideration represent the fruits of intensive, collaborative efforts by member States, development partners and the secretariat during the past two years.

Conclusion

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The opportunities and challenges to advance statistics for the benefit of every person in Asia and the Pacific were never greater than they are at this fourth session of the Committee on Statistics. Your deliberations and decisions this week are of great strategic importance as the World and our region prepare to implement and monitor the development agenda beyond 2015.

It is my hope that we will find a common voice in support of statistics for development, endorsing the proposed regional plans and collaborative mechanisms that have been put forward for decision.

I wish you a successful Committee session.

I thank you.