

Opening Remarks
Regional Workshop on Modernization of Official Statistics
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Your Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

It is my honour and sincere pleasure to be here and to address you on behalf of the United Nations Statistics Division at this **Regional Workshop on Modernization of Official Statistics**.

I would like to start by thanking His Excellency Dr. Saleh Al Nabit and the Planning and Statistics Authority of the State of Qatar for inviting my office and for your kind hospitality. I thank you for bringing everyone together here today and for drawing attention to the important topic of modernizing official statistics. Let me also thank Dr. Ahmad Hussein for his efforts in the excellent organization of this event.

Your Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

The United Nations is very much focused these days on the urgent implementation of the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These goals were adopted by all United Nations Member States in September 2015. They are an urgent call for action by all countries to end poverty, to improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth while tackling at the same time climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

My office serves the United Nations Statistical Commission, which has been tasked to ensure that our policy-makers and the society as a whole will have good and relevant data to know if we are on the right path in achieving the sustainable development goals. In other words, the world is counting on our community, the community of official statisticians, to deliver the necessary statistics and indicators to inform the government policies.

To improve the availability of data, the Statistical Commission adopted in 2017 the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data. It calls upon the global statistical community to take action on the strategic area of modernizing and strengthening the national statistical systems with a focus on modernizing the governance and institutional framework; on applying statistical standards and new data architecture for data sharing, exchange and integration; and on facilitating the use of new technology and new data sources in statistical production processes. This workshop therefore fits very well with that call for action.

Your Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

Electronic data are nowadays continuously generated in enormous quantities. Data are generated from our mobile devices, from all sorts of payment transactions, from satellites, drones and other remote sensing devices and now also through 5G technology from all kinds of objects and all kinds of systems: your cars, your household appliances, energy systems, public transportation, and so forth. The amounts of available data are overwhelming. These are all Big Data sources.

We, as statisticians, should see Big Data as an opportunity and a possibility to help us produce timely, frequent, detailed and therefore more relevant statistics and indicators.

For example, we can use earth observation data to develop insights on the environment, on climate action and on disaster recovery; we can use mobile phone positioning data to protect our health by containing the spread of contagious diseases, like Ebola, and we can use a combination of satellite and mobile phone data to improve the living conditions in our urban areas.

In 2014, the United Nations Global Working Group on Big Data for official statistics was created by the Statistical Commission to give strategic vision, direction and coordination for a global program on methods and practical use of Big Data sources, such as satellite data, mobile phone data, scanner data or social media data.

I am very pleased that I can say now – five years into this journey – that we have made enormous progress. Besides the developments of handbooks and training materials, the Global Working Group has also created the so-called UN Global Platform. This is a cloud-based digital collaboration environment for our statistical community and all its stakeholder groups. On this platform we can work together to innovate and modernize our methods and data services. The platform organization promotes global networking and facilitates the exchange, the development and the sharing of data, methods, tools and expertise, and therefore accelerates data innovation.

Examples of projects currently conducted on the platform are use of satellite data for agricultural crop statistics, use of scanner data for calculation of Consumer Price Index, and use of mobile phone test data for estimating domestic tourism statistics.

Your Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

In closing, I would like to emphasize that we, as the global community of official statistics, have been given the task to produce statistics and indicators to monitor progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

By using Big Data to develop new methods and new applications, we should also keep focus on how these data, methods and applications can produce statistics and indicators that can help policy makers, researchers and help business to achieve the SDGs and help to fulfill the promises of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This workshop can help to make an additional step in the process of modernizing official statistics.

Thank you.