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**SESSION 6 – UNLEASHING THE POWER OF PACIFIC DATA**

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The SPC Director-General

The Chair of HOPS

Dr Ofa Ketu'ú Director of SPC thank you for inviting me.

I am honoured to be here in the Pacific where the waters can be very calm and peaceful as well as can be rough and stormy. Unleashing the Pacific Data, the theme you have chosen for this the 5<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference of Heads of Planning and Statistics (HOPS) rhymes with a number of themes of a sleeping giant. The citizens of the Pacific know too well from experience that the region has repeatedly shown that it can be very deadly when angered, carrying with it untold destruction to human life and property. Yet its beauty, its serene and peaceful waves, its unique vegetation, the endless view of its waters and the multitudes of its islands, the colourfully dressed people and their peaceful coexistence with their surroundings, the tourist attractions it offers put to shame its often deadly anger. Its distance from everywhere else and especially where I come from remains its magic. On the other hand hops is one of the four crucial ingredients in beer. The other three are water, malt, and yeast. HOPS therefore plays in this space where people can be made very happy or aggressive when they have partaken of beer.

We recall that the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was accompanied by the Millennium Declaration where world leaders committed to the eight Millennium Declaration Goals (MDGs) and the 18 targets and the accompanying 48 indicators. This effort gave rise to recognition of statistics, but did not go far enough especially in addressing the plight of the peoples of the Small Islands Developing States – (SIDS) the peoples of which are spread over three geographical regions of the world - the Pacific and the Atlantic, the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea (AIMS). When the environment is angered we know it through these three regions and in similar ways when HOPS does its work in alcohol we see its effects on the people's excitement and at times anger. My friend Gerald Haberkorn, wrote me a very nasty letter where he complains that after all these years of knowing him, I have never set foot in the Pacific only to do so after he has retired. He asks me the question why have I chosen to do so in this way. He reminds me that I fell in love with the SIDS and became part of you in our meetings in New York by claiming that my country of birth - Lesotho is also a SIDS, small and surrounded completely by South Africa. My response was that now that I have retired from being a statistician of South Africa I am ready to live an island life and nothing should hold me back from doing so and I cannot help admiring the beauty and peace embedded in your community.

The SIDS have a community of 52 countries 38 of which are UN member states and 14 are non-UN members or are Associate Members of Regional Communities harbour for the world very important and crucial environmental assets. The Pacific SIDS of Fiji, Republic of Marshal Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and our host here in Noumea in New Caledonia represent a new and focused meaning for the notion of leaving no one behind. Thus unleashing the power of the Pacific Data means unleashing the power of everyone's data whether big or small. The way you are defined is in terms of your human population and in that respect you may appear small, but if we were to consider the extent of jurisdiction over your waters and marine life you remain very big. Allow me to define your greatness. In my country South Africa we have eleven official languages and Sepedi language which resides under the Sesotho group of languages prides itself of an important saying. There is a particular medicinal plant which comes in minute quantities the medicinal powers of which extend far and near. It unleashes this not from its size but from the force of its aroma or odour. For as long as its smell is present then its curative powers are felt and remain effective. From this observation the Bapeli people who use this miniature plant for health say that Serokoloana which is the name extends its powers through its smell. Unleashing the power

of the Pacific Data is like unleashing the power of Serokoloana which extends its useful medicinal application through its power of smell.

Why are the SIDS so important and as powerful as Serokoloana? We note that the advent of the Sustainable Development Goals settled on 17 Global Goals compared to the 8 in the MDGs, agreed on 169 targets compared to the 20 in the MDGs and 302 indicators compared to the 48 in the MDG era. A closer look at the agenda shows that ten of these goals have a direct link to the environment. The SIDS are in the engine room of environmental concerns and thus as we as the United Nations Statistics Community (UNSC) are seized by the System of Environmental and Economic Accounting we draw directly from the SIDS environment. I am part of the Global Environment Outlook Report GEO6 and our work concerns itself with data and statistics including indigenous knowledge systems. The SIDS have learnt to coexist with the environment for ages. They understand that they are central to the post-2015 Agenda of Dignity, People, Planet, Partnerships, Justice and Prosperity. I have in the preceding discussion laid the foundation of my interpretation of your theme.

Coming back to the theme of the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference – Unleashing the Power of Pacific Data therefore - allow me to make some tentative suggestions, discuss some risks associated with the suggestions but be more concrete in terms of how the future will look like and what it will demand as you unleash and rightly so the Power of Pacific Data. Let me foreground my suggestions by arguing that like the medicinal plant, serokoloana of the Bapedi in South Africa, data and statistics have their power not in the amount of money and resources deployed towards them, but rather in their ability to influence, in their visibility to give meaning to the other – indeed the odour and aroma they carry with each and every human endeavour they multiply their effectiveness. Statistics have the power of making value visible but it is for those who produce them that such value should be visible to the users. More importantly those who produce statistics must know how to appropriate value for sustainable growth and thus development. Perhaps this is where most statisticians fail. They are unable to lead the chant for value appropriation. Let us remember at all times that statistics is a conduit of trust – bringing nations, communities and peoples together, connecting people and planet for prosperity. We who endeavour to be in this space we dare not fail those who have entrusted us with this precious conduit of trust. So we need to be trustworthy.

There are some simple tools I have successfully applied in my career of 34 years with seventeen as a statistician-general of South Africa in advancing the idea of value visibility and value

appropriation. The first had to do with understanding why I am a statistician. And when I got appointed seventeen years ago as South Africa's very first Statistician-General, I was confident about what my role was. I had ordered my priorities first and foremost as that of being a statistician, second knowing, understanding and deploying technology and geography in my space for implementation of statistical programmes, third ensuring that I master logistics and at any point my antenna should be on the ball, fourth I knew that administration is important and in particular the Auditor General should not sniff your tail and find you wanting and fifth I prioritised understanding politics. This was the order in which my priorities were set when I entered office. I was alive to the fact that as a statistician-general you are the most exposed person in your environment and the attendant responsibility is immense. I was also clear that all these require and claim the same amount of energy from the statistician-general. As I grew older and possibly wiser in my job, I realised that the ordering of my priorities was wrong in fact in order to succeed you need to work the politics first and foremost. This is the task most statisticians do not know, understand and at their best fear. You need to work the politics by that I mean understand them fully without being partisan and political. If you can keep the politics close but far then you will succeed. What do I mean? You have to understand the political environment fully and its attendant influence. But ensure that through upfront articulation of your legislative conditionalities and responsibilities to the public in administering the public good you keep the line in the sand clear. You therefore need to be the first to communicate and do so with clarity. You are the chief spokesperson of your state of the nation because you administer their facts but understand that you are not the President and harbour no aspirations of being so for you can easily slide into politics and their factional influences. Second, I realised that to keep the Auditor General happy, I have to comply no matter what. No one however beautiful are your statistics will believe you if you manage badly. In fact you are likely to receive public sympathy when your management systems are aces all the time. You have to really be excellent in logistics and in fact when you communicate their complexity such as in censuses and surveys they buy you mileage in the public space. A census provides you the best platform never to be forgotten by everyone. It provides the basis for dissemination of results. Thus continuity and presence remain crucial over the period of preparations, execution and delivery of results and ride on its wave for everything else. Fourth knowing and understanding technology and applying these on the statistical value chain in politics throughout to delivery of results as a fundamental platform enables you to make value visible and fifth and finally always remember that you are a trained statistician and a master of your

destination therefore know your message and communicate it well. So from ordering the priorities first as being a statistician to where I realised that knowing the politics was crucial gave me the ability to create value and knowing when to appropriate it.

I have dealt with setting the priorities right. Then what were the tools? Setting up the tools had to do with knowing why statistics and in this regard I would suggest that statistics are for four fundamental deliverables and these are namely transparency, accountability, results and transformation. To achieve these four fundamental objectives the chief statisticians have therefore to first and foremost lead effectively, second they have to be driven with relentless strategic focus, third the statistical products must be visible and address both current and future needs drawing on previous lessons including hitherto to be revealed lessons, fourth the statistical processes and their attendant value chains should embed renewal as a strategic resource for a statistical system and fifth and finally in terms of their organisation and management systems, those entrusted with their production including their coordination must earn their keep as trustworthy persons and individuals.

#### **WHAT WOULD STATISTICAL LEADERSHIP MEAN?**

Without being prescriptive then what would statistical leadership entail and embrace. In the first place there has to be legislation that acts as a catalyst for institutional reform, but such changes in legislation must be driven by maturity of practice which renders current legislation as irrelevant. A dynamic leader is crucial. At the level of transparency I hold use of statistics and the chief of its system to be responsible for driving use of statistics for mutual trust in framing and leading statecraft. In as far as accountability is concerned the chief of statistics should drive production and their use for results based management and finally in relation to transformation I hold the chief of statistics to lead usage of statistics to drive change for different and better results. So the leader of the system must endeavour to be transparent, accountable, results oriented and transformative in profession and conduct.

#### **WHAT WOULD IT TAKE AT STRATEGIC PLANNING LEVEL?**

At a strategic level the chief statistician should ensure that administrative records become the platform through which the system is strategically positioned to embed practices and procedures. More importantly the statistical metrics should be used to drive change.

## **WHAT OF STATISTICAL PRODUCTS?**

Statistical products should drive transformation and this is possible when the products are systematically visible in the measures of outcomes and impact. This requires that the leadership of statistics must assemble statistical releases in ways that are beyond descriptive but analytical to shed what the correlates and determinants of change are.

## **WHAT PROCESSES SHOULD BE PUT IN PLACE?**

The statistical processes should enhance predictability and raise legitimate expectations from the institution. Every release must enhance future performance expectations of the institution. Such confidence building must be understood to be in the process.

## **ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT**

It is crucial that lessons learnt catalyse change for the better. This implies that high performance teams have to be created in the organisation, which in the main requires first, joint application developments for products, second, use of and adaptation to new technologies, third, doing more with increasingly less as efficiencies dominate our delivery architecture and fourth achieving user delight and providing an unforgettable experience. Through integrated products can a message understood at the outcome and impact level be possible and delivered. So communication is central to the new 21<sup>st</sup> century statistician.

	Statistics for>>	Transparency	Accountability	Results	Transformation
<b>Statistical Leadership:</b> 	Embed use through legislative and institutional authority	Use statistics for mutual trust in statecraft	Use statistics for mutual accountability and governance	Use statistics for results-based management	Use statistics to lead change for different and better results
<b>Strategic planning:</b> 	Embed use in administrative practices and procedures	Use statistical metrics for fact based norms and standards	Use statistical indicators for mutual accountability	Use statistical targets for results based management	Use statistical metrics to drive change
<b>Statistical products:</b> 	Embed use through application of products in service delivery	Ensure that products are accessible and understood	Ensure that products anticipate and respond to policy questions and concerns	Ensure that you provide evidence about the use of products	Use statistical products measure outcomes and impact measures to spur change
<b>Statistical process:</b> 	Embed use through consultation, training and user support	Provide metadata with the results	Anticipate user and support needs Report in cycles predictable	Put systems and infrastructure for access and use of results	Inspire better and different outcome expectations to drive change
<b>Organisation &amp; management:</b> 	Embed use in the organisation	Ensure that methods are known and understood	Publish statistics that are produced and ensure access	Anticipate user requests and address them	Use lessons learnt to catalyse change for better

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Statistics is an evolving contender in the high stakes of public policy. It comes in as a lens that provides clearer visibility, it comes in as a holder of methods and standards and comes in as an honest broker advancing use of credible evidence. With all the good it holds potentially, it is naïve to imagine that it will be a with open arms welcome sibling. It is unlikely to acquire its rightful place without a political struggle to secure its crucial legislative mandate. It is a Jimmy come to town lately in a space as contested as is the notion of the state. Governments, in particular the executive is under exceeding pressure from the judiciary and legislature who demand accountability and the task of the executive is not made easy as another battery of accountability requirements that emerge from the nascent powers of the Auditor General, the Ombudsmen and the Public Protector amongst others. Statistics and its leadership as a new comer in this architecture that pursues transparency, accountability, results and transformation must establish its value visibility and what value it should correctly appropriate in this highly contested terrain. The task is further made more demand by the notion of leaving no one behind – a matter political masters across the world have

signed up to. This morning we were led in prayer and often Jesus asks us what the qualities of a good shepherd are. He answers that it is one who will leave the hundred sheep and hunt for the one that is lost. Now imagine a politician held to account why water has not reached the remaining 1% of the population. This is not going to sit well with politics as statistics reveal the herd that is not in the kraal.

We therefore need to recognize that statistics can succeed as an accountability mechanism undergirding all these systems of governance in their nascent emergent and old transforming forms. It is the glue that holds these emergent and pressing architecture that enjoins citizens and governments in a clearer and more robust accountability framework. It is a crucial ingredient of democracies and it is the only known dependable driver of access to choices.

### **What is the positioning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Statistician-General?**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Statistician-General is an honest broker of statistics, a communicator of value par-excellence, a stickler for principle understanding the consequences of bad statistics as well as political risks associated with cosy relationships with politics. It is one who does not throw statistics over the fence and asks politicians to make sense of them, but it is one who takes time to interpret and explains the statistics conscious of the attendant risks. It is one who continues to find what technological solutions are emerging from the horizon and what efficiencies they may deliver. It is one who keeps at training and encouraging their staff to reach better heights. It is one who knows that the SIDS count and make the point that the success of the world and its sustainable development goals are proven to be achieved only and only if the SIDS are not left behind. For all these to happen and be achieved let us always remember that the power of the tiny medicinal herb of the Bapedi of South Africa that uses the function of odour and aroma for effectiveness. The successful Unleashing of the Power of Pacific Data depends on influence odour, fragrance and aroma.

Thank you for your kind attention