

The Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics

The emphasis on quantitative targets in the Millennium Development Goals and the growing attention to measuring results have increased the demand for statistics. They have also increased our awareness of the poor state of statistical systems in many parts of the developing world. Good statistics are not a technical issue. As Trevor Manuel has said, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it". Data and statistics are needed by governments, politicians, and managers. Crucially, they are needed by citizens to hold governments accountable for their actions and results. Improving statistical systems is a development issue, which requires concerted action by the entire global community and not just professional statisticians.

At the Second International Roundtable Conference on Managing for Development Results, representatives of the multilateral development banks, the OECD Development Assistance Committee, and UN programs and agencies proposed an action plan for improving development statistics. The plan has three objectives:

1. To strengthen national capacity to produce, analyze and use reliable statistics.
2. To improve the quality and availability of development statistics for global monitoring.
3. To support countries that are expanding their statistical capacity.

Six broad sets of actions

The Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (MAPS) builds on existing initiatives and country experience to set out six broad sets of actions needed to improve statistics at both national and international levels.

1. *Mainstream strategic planning of statistical systems and help all low-income countries prepare national statistical development strategies by 2006.* Statistical requirements must be derived from wider development strategies, such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, not treated as a separate issue.

2. *Strengthen preparations for 2010 census.* Censuses are a core source of development statistics and underpin the ability to monitor progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. We must begin now if adequate information is to be in place to assess progress in 2015.

3. *Increase financial support for statistical capacity building.* In many cases countries will need to increase their own financing for statistics, but they will also require external assistance. In the spirit of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, countries that adopt good policies for their

statistical systems should receive needed financial support for statistics.

4. *Set up an international household survey network.* Surveys have become increasingly important for measuring social outcomes, but need better coordination.
5. *Undertake urgent improvements needed for Millennium Development Goal monitoring for 2005.* The world expects a candid and complete report on progress next year.
6. *Increase accountability of the international statistical system.* The international agencies must further improve their own practices.

Costs

The incremental cost of these activities is around US\$120 million a year for improving national statistical systems and around US\$25 million a year for improving international systems. These are not exhaustive costs. For example, they exclude the costs of the 2010 census. Nor do they include the costs for improvements in other statistical sources such as establishment surveys or administrative reporting. These are first estimates, which will be refined as the proposals are developed and fine tuned. Also note that these costs are for financing from all possible sources, national as well as donors.